Writing to Transgress: Knowledge Production in Feminist Participatory Action Research

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Abstract: The process of writing and the textual form and format that scientific knowledge takes tend to be organized by traditional rules for knowledge production that are reinforced in the publication arena. Too often participatory action researchers must adhere to scholarly writing conventions that may be at odds with the epistemic stance and discursive claims of the feminist researchers who produce them. In this article, we reflect on our experience of writing to transgress conventions for scholarly writing using a previously published paper about and with a lone mother living in poverty. In our examination of this case study we argue that our writing process and the transgressive textual form and format we used were a more authentic reflection of our epistemic stance as critical realists and more consistent with the principles and assumptions underpinning feminist participatory action research—assumptions that privilege power-sharing, voice, subjectivity and reflexivity. We also show how maternal identities and their lived experiences can be constituted differently through transgressive writing practices. We consider some benefits that may accrue to those who are willing and able to challenge disciplinary boundaries for knowledge production and the practical and ethical challenges such a venture may expose.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

An unexpected occurrence when publishing an article in a scholarly journal sparked an exploration of the previously unexamined disconnect between our epistemic stance as critical realists and the traditional expectations for form and format in knowledge production. A few years ago, we set out to report on our experiences with negotiating power relations when conducting research with and about lone mothers. The multivoiced article we wrote reflected the divergent voices of community-and academic-researchers (GUSTAFSON, SWAN, GILLINGHAM & PARSONS, 2016). While we had no conscious intent to transgress publication norms, we hoped that our commitment to authentic collaboration would be evident in our creative approach to writing a scholarly story. [1]

After our article was accepted for publication it was reformatted by a copyeditor to conform to traditional rules for layout and writing style. Our creativity was apparently misconstrued as not understanding the disciplinary rules for scholarly writing. We appreciate that copyeditors are technicians with a details-oriented job to perform under sometimes precarious conditions. Still we remained curious about how the traditional conventions for producing and sharing the knowledge we generated from our participatory action research (PAR) project were reinforced in the publication arena. This curiosity moved us to question the institutionalized rules for knowledge production that seemed to be at odds with the assumptions underpinning feminist PAR and our epistemic stance as critical realists. [2]

Those who conduct PAR face a range of challenges in producing knowledge about the lived experiences of marginalized and under-resourced populations (ALCOFF, 2006, 2009; CRIMMINS, 2018; FISHER et al., 2015). Some researchers reflect on their enactment of power relations in research (CHABOT, SHOVELLER, SPENCER & JOHNSON, 2012; GUSTAFSON & BRUNGER, 2014; JANES, 2016a). Others offer strategies for effectively building partnerships between the academy and the community (SMITH, ROSENZWEIG & SCHMIDT, 2010; TOWNSEND, 2013). Still others reflect on ways to negotiate power embedded in institutionalized contexts such as funding agencies and research ethics boards (GUSTAFSON & BRUNGER, 2014; PARR, 2015). But according to Andrew TOWNSEND (2013), power and control in the construction of knowledge are largely taken-for-granted and undertheorized. Some researchers and theorists are addressing this gap by discussing ways to better navigate the work of producing and sharing knowledge in the academy (CRIMMINS, 2018; ELLIS et al., 2018; FLICKER & NIXON, 2016; FORCHUK & MEIER, 2014; GRANEK & NAKASH, 2015). In this article we join this conversation. [3]

Using our companion article (GUSTAFSON et al., 2016) as a case study[1] we consider the value of *writing to transgress* as a way to subvert traditional ways of representing knowledge and to underscore the value of doing so. Transgressive writing practices are a more authentic reflection of our epistemic stance as critical realists and more consistent with the principles and assumptions underpinning feminist PAR. Moreover, the knowledge we produced with and about our community-researchers shows how individuals, their maternal identities and their lived experiences can be constituted differently through transgressive writing practices. [4]

In this article, we address four questions:

1. How can we better align our writing practices with our epistemic claims as feminist academics conducting PAR?
2. What does it mean to transgress rules for scholarly writing?
3. What are the benefits of writing to transgress?
4. What ethical and practical concerns are exposed when challenging traditional boundaries for knowledge production and scholarly writing? [5]

A brief introduction to the philosophical assumptions that underpin our research practice leads to an introduction to our feminist PAR project about lone mothers receiving income support.[2] We lay out how we tried to enact our discursive claims as critical realists from the outset of our study to the challenges of producing knowledge products in publication spaces that operate at odds with those claims. After that we discuss traditional scholarly writing practices and the epistemological assumptions that have traditionally informed how academics learn to produce and share knowledge. Using examples drawn from our companion article (GUSTAFSON et al., 2016) we illustrate how writing to transgress can challenge the power-knowledge production nexus posed by traditional writing practices. We conclude with a discussion of the benefits that may accrue to writers who transgress disciplinary boundaries and a reflection on the practical and ethical challenges such a venture may expose. [6]

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1 Tracy SWAN, one of the co-authors of the companion article has since retired and was unavailable to contribute to this manuscript.

2 Newfoundland lone mother community-researchers prefer the term *income support* to other terms, such as social assistance, public assistance or welfare and thus, it is the term we use here.

2. Feminist Participatory Action Research

2.1 Epistemology—The philosophical assumptions that shaped our research practice

PAR, *community-based participatory research, action research* and *community-engaged scholarship* are a few of the many terms employed to describe an approach to research that addresses local needs and broader societal concerns, and advances social equity and inclusion (MACAULEY, 2017). The history of PAR can be traced to the UK and the US in the 1940s with Kurt LEWIN (1946), to the emancipatory research of Paulo FREIRE (1970) in the 1970s, to Orlando FALS-BORDA (1987) in Latin America in the early 1980s. Over the last few decades in Canada, there has been increased valuing across disciplines in partnerships between academics and the public (FRANKISH et al., 2015; JANES, 2016a; 2016b; MORRIS, 2002). With Canadian funding bodies pushing for more community-engaged research, academics are actively seeking greater involvement with community partners (MACAULEY, 2017). This means critically reflecting on the philosophical assumptions that shape our research practice and knowledge production. [7]

Two epistemological questions underpin all research practice: What counts as knowledge? Who counts as a knower? As feminist researchers engaged in PAR, we adhere to the critical realist tradition. In this tradition researchers seek to unearth those institutional and systemic mechanisms that organize power relations—mechanisms such as gender, race/ethnicity and class (HOUSTON, 2014; PARR, 2015). In other words, we look beyond the world of appearances to unearth hidden interests and generative mechanisms that produce social inequalities and injustices (HOUSTON, 2014). Similarly, our goal in this article is to question the normative assumptions that maintain traditional structures and processes for constituting and sharing knowledge generated by PAR researchers. We highlight how these traditional writing structures grounded in positivist assumptions about knowledge production pose barriers for those of us whose research is informed by post-positivist assumptions. In particular, how do these traditional forms and formats limit the scholarly stories we can share about lone mothers' experiences of social exclusion? [8]

Critical realism differs from traditional approaches to research that are grounded in the positivist paradigm. The positivist paradigm demands a value-neutral separation between the researcher and the researched. This principle establishes the academic-researcher as the knower and producer of knowledge (CRIMMINS, 2018). By contrast, critical realists tend to be driven by core feminist (and other anti-oppression and social justice) values (JANES, 2016a). Feminist PAR researchers try to facilitate an organic connection among research goals, equity-based processes and transformative community-engaged, solutions-focused outcomes. [9]

Logically, this commitment should translate into PAR researchers acting as agents in transforming the power-knowledge production nexus through our writing practice. Our experience showed us that this can be difficult to enact. A review of the literature indicates that we are not alone (CRIMMINS, 2018; ELLIS et al., 2018; FLICKER & NIXON, 2016; FORCHUK & MEIER, 2014; GRANEK & NAKASH, 2015). We contend that the traditional rules for publishing our findings in scholarly journals may be at odds with the epistemic stance and discursive claims we hold as feminists conducting PAR. In the next section, we outline our PAR project. Using this case study, we illustrate the disconnect between the ideals and practices of feminist PAR and how we sought to enact those discursive claims when conducting our project and writing about lone mothers who receive income support. [10]

2.2 Our feminist PAR project—The case study

The Lone Mothers: Building Social Inclusion was a five-year funded research alliance established between academic researchers from five universities, and lone mothers and government and non-profit community organizations in three Canadian provinces. In one of these research sites four academics partnered with eleven lone mothers to engage in feminist PAR. Our primary theoretical and practical on-the-ground goal was building social inclusion. The process of engaging in research and generating knowledge products intended to build community research capacity and create meaningful change for the individuals involved. For those reasons, lone mothers were included in many aspects of the project: developing interview protocols, recruiting and conducting interviews with lone mother participants, and analyzing data. [11]

Another goal of the project was to share lone mothers' stories of living in poverty with different audiences and to challenge dominant tropes about their maternal identities. The team produced a series of knowledge products for local community knowledge users and the wider academic community. Traditional knowledge dissemination activities included co-presenting at conferences, in classrooms and at community agencies. More creative, arts-based strategies involved co-producing a theater performance and later, a video recording based on a day in Brenda's life as a lone mother receiving income support. [12]

Despite our best intentions, we like many academic-researchers before us faced challenges in representing the lived experiences of the under-resourced population with whom we partnered. Brenda's words (later documented in the companion article) served as the lightning rod for self-examination.

> "How dare all these academic types—you know who you are—take my life, my horrible wretched life, and use it to further your agenda. My life of poverty and destitution, my life of suffering, my life of having to eke out an existence for me and my children, my life of frustration, my life of sadness of not being able to adequately provide for my children, and use it to write papers and show people who should already know how absolutely gut-wrenching-awful poverty is, to realize that they maybe would/should think before they act" (GUSTAFSON et al., 2016, p.303). [13]

Brenda and three academic-researchers decided to document that self-examination. By showing rather than telling that story, we turned the act of writing collaboratively into a demonstration of how we negotiated power relations and represented maternal identities. While it was not our conscious intention at the time, that since-published article challenged traditional rules for writing about our process. Before we outline the form and format of that article, traditional scholarly writing practices are discussed. [14]

3. Traditional Scholarly Writing Practices

When the time comes to disseminate findings, academic-researchers are expected to deliver knowledge products that satisfy the competing goals of funders, the academic community, their community partners and their own goals for career advancement. These navigations take place within patriarchal, racializing and classed institutions and funding agencies to which academic-researchers are accountable (JANES, 2016b). Power resides quite robustly within these institutional contexts—often the very contexts that academic and community partners are trying to challenge. These hierarchies are also embedded in the publication arena and are evident in how researchers are expected to re/present their findings. The form and format of scholarly products reflect epistemological assumptions about who can be a knower and what constitutes legitimate knowledge. These assumptions can pose barriers to creating textual forms of knowledge that reflect feminists' epistemic stance. [15]

Think about an article that you, as an academic-researcher, have authored. Scholarly writing or what Bob PEASE (2010) refers to as "academese" (p.3) has rules that novice researchers are expected to learn. These rules tend to enforce a particular kind of knowledge production—knowledge that has been variously described as "dense, dry, flat," "intellectually difficult," "emotionally detached," and apolitical (ibid.). [16]

You probably consulted the journal's guidelines about how the manuscript must be formatted. In the introduction, you described the research objectives and the context. Previously published and relevant studies are synthesized and discussed in a literature review section. You outlined your methodology—perhaps it was a PAR project. You may have expressed your commitment, as feminists do, to the core values of empowerment, transformative action and community engagement. In the findings section, you presented those quotations that best represented participants' voices, using their words to develop the central theme in the narrative. If there were dissenting voices, you provided supporting quotations. Gail SIMON calls this "*about-ness* writing" where researchers report as outsiders rather than from within relationships where relations of power play out in language choices (2013, §2). In the discussion section, you framed your findings theoretically, followed by a list of recommendations for future research, program, practice or policy change or community intervention. Does this sound familiar? [17]

In addition to rules for the structure of the article, there are also rules for argumentation. Truth claims must be supported by referencing existing

knowledge. In other words, everything we write must be validated by someone else who has made that claim before you. There are also rules for how these references are cited, and quotations formatted (FLICKER & NIXON, 2016; TRIBBLE & WINGATE, 2013). [18]

Now think about who wrote that article and how well that approach reflected your discursive claims about power-sharing, subjectivity, voice and reflexivity. Kathryn HERR and Gary ANDERSON (2005) propose a 6-point continuum that ranges from token or symbolic involvement to full collaboration of team members in the writing process. Academic writing in the social sciences tends to fall at the extreme end of this continuum with articles authored by a sole researcher or members of their academic team. When this happens, it is the academic version that goes to print; a version that cannot be disputed by those participants whose words have been appropriated. One review of the literature indicates that no studies achieve full collective action (at the other end of HERR and ANDERSON's continuum) with most falling in the middle (SMITH et al., 2010). Perhaps you are among those who recognize the contribution of community partners by including their names in the authorship list alongside yours (see, for example, FORTIN, JACKSON, MAHER & MORAVAC, 2013). Even this act can fall short. Too few of us (and Janice and Diana include ourselves here) actively and consistently engage community-researchers (in our case, lone mothers) as co-narrators in the production of a text about their lives. [19]

The very language we use to describe our research alliances is also telling. Consider how project partners write about themselves and their work. Academics are named researchers while community partners are labeled research "assistants" or assume the role of RAs.[3] Such language homogenizes the identities and material practices of community participants, simultaneously subordinating them and their contributions to those of the academics. More concerning, according to Julia JANES, are discursive claims about research alliances that constitute the "good" academic working to better the lives of community members "in need of improvement" (2016a, p.82). Not surprisingly, some are calling for researchers to write these relationships differently (FISHER et al., 2015). [20]

Once a draft is completed, there is a peer review process that must be negotiated. Peer reviewers are expected to comment on the merits of the work, including the content, the format and the architecture of the argument. Guidelines for reviewers not infrequently privilege rationality, logic and objectivity over emotionality, creativity and subjectivity. [21]

The journal editor considers the reviewers' comments and decides on the disposition of the manuscript. If it is accepted for publication, the copyeditor is tasked with ensuring that the manuscript conforms to the journal's rules for format

3   We refer to ourselves collectively as research partners and to denote our socio-political location in relation to the project with the terms academic-researchers and community-researchers. We have used the common term, research assistant (RA), in previous writings including the project proposal but have since changed our language to be consistent with our epistemic stance as feminists and critical realists.

and writing style. There are positive reasons for these writing conventions such
providing guidance to authors and a measure of quality control across
publications. At the same time, such rules for formatting organize and restrict how
a scholarly story can be told (CRIMMINS, 2018; ELLIS, 2009). [22]

What echoes in these processes, structures and language are the assumptions
and principles that govern positivist research—that researchers maintain a
cautious detachment in the production of knowledge (THAKUR, 2008). Rules for
writing establish clear boundaries for what constitutes legitimate knowledge.
There is nothing neutral or innocent about these rules. As Mona LIVHOLTS
(2012) reminds us, these "mainstream textual forms are often related to a system
that privileges certain kinds of knowledge over other, subjugated knowledge"
(p.3). This approach to knowledge production is particularly paradoxical at a time
when innovative thinking and excellence in community-engaged research are
high priorities. [23]

4. Writing to Transgress

4.1 Examining the power-knowledge production nexus

Positivist assumptions and principles are robustly embedded in the processes,
structures and language of the mainstream publication arena (LIVHOLTS, 2012;
THAKUR, 2008). Feminist PAR researchers are expected to share knowledge
generated with or about community partners in this arena. However, there is a
disjuncture between the epistemic stance of PAR researchers and the way we
have learned and are frequently expected to construct and share knowledge in
traditional spaces—spaces that value the detached researcher, objectivity,
rationality and logic. This means that feminist PAR researchers who value power-
sharing, subjectivity, reflexivity and voice are too often expected to adhere to
traditional textual form and formats that do not align with the assumptions that
drive other facets of community-engaged research. These institutionalized
processes establish academic-researchers as the final arbiters and constructers
of knowledge and theory, or in our case, maternal identities and what it means to
raise children alone while living in poverty. [24]

How do we account for this disconnect between epistemic stance and knowledge
production? Data collected in the name of liberatory research must
simultaneously further academic aims such as promotion or grants funding rather
than community-driven goals. Some academic-researchers acknowledge this
real-life dilemma (GRANEK & NAKASH, 2015; JANES, 2016a). Those who feel
an obligation to the goals of feminist PAR (e.g., empowerment, transformative
action and community enrichment) must invest time and genuine care in
developing trusting relationships that produce deliverables that have value for the
community. However, some community partners (including Brenda) view peer-
reviewed publications as largely inaccessible documents that serve dominant
interests. Creating this type of knowledge consumes valuable time and resources
that could be more meaningfully spent doing frontline support, advocacy work or
creating more accessible knowledge products (FLICKER & NIXON, 2016;

JANES, 2016a; YEN-KOHL & THE NEWTOWN FLORIST CLUB WRITING COLLECTIVE, 2016). Art-based activities are among such meaningful knowledge products (see, for example, ELLIS, 1999; ELLIS et al., 2018). However, theater performances and videos such as those we produced with and for our local communities may not be as well rewarded in the academy as traditional dissemination strategies such as peer-reviewed conference abstracts, policy reports and journal articles (BOYDELL et al., 2016). [25]

Our intention here is not to demonize individual researchers or devalue their work. We count ourselves among those whose good intentions have fallen short despite our efforts to collaborate in all aspects of the research and dissemination processes (GUSTAFSON & BRUNGER, 2014; PARSONS, 2008). However, it seems reasonable to ask: Why do feminists accept these rules? The answer is both simple and complex. It is important to tell these stories. Feminists take seriously their obligation to participants, funders and academic institutions to disseminate research findings. We need and want to share these stories with a wide audience. That means following the normative rules in the spaces where we communicate those stories. It is also understandable that we would take pride in having developed discipline-specific skills to write and publish research. To challenge accepted rules is risky (CRIMMINS, 2018). It means writing against what bell hooks refers to as the "taught" self, in other words, all those academic values and beliefs we have internalized. Doing so requires a "critical awareness of the self" or a kind of "self-transgression" (HOOKS, 1994, p.14). [26]

Also important is the lack of guidance in how to disseminate PAR findings given the (often times) inflexible discipline-based rules that govern what constitutes an acceptable journal article (BOYDELL et al., 2016; VERED, 2016). [27]

In the next section, we look back on our experience of writing a since-published article (GUSTAFSON et al., 2016) about negotiating power in a feminist PAR project. We describe our process of writing collaboratively and the textual form that emerged—a form that, in retrospect, transgressed the traditional rules for academic writing by showing as well as telling our learning story. [28]

4.2 What might transgressive writing look like?

Transgressing traditional rules has the potential to challenge the power-knowledge production nexus. How do we understand *transgression*? [29]

In 1984, bell HOOKS published a collection of essays titled "Teaching to Transgress" in which she combined theoretical argument with personal reflection to push scholars of all disciplines to transgress or break the bonds and restrictive boundaries that govern what we say and how we speak. More recently, playwright, Naomi WALLACE (2008), said that writing as a transgressive act means to "step over the line, redraw the line, erase the line, even multiply the lines so that we sit up, step forward and strike out" (p.98). However, the act of transgression must have a purpose whether it is to challenge taken-for-granted beliefs, power relations, or our relationship to the *status quo*. Deirdre LASHGARI

(1995), for example, used transgressive writing to express women's stories of violence and anger while Mona LIVHOLTS (2012) edited a collection of feminist essays that used varying transgressive writing styles to explore power, embodiment, materiality and other political forces. Autoethnographers such as Carolyn ELLIS and colleagues (2018) and geographers such as Karen FISHER and colleagues (2015) write against normative expectations. [30]

When we talk about scholarly writing as transgression, what boundaries are we attempting to step over, redraw or erase? What did we do "differently"? There are two aspects to this: the process of collaborative writing and the textual form of the manuscript we produced. [31]

When our team sat down to write the article that is our case study, we agreed to chronicle our story in a way that foregrounded Brenda's concern about power relations and control over knowledge production. We wanted to unsettle the long-standing subjugation of lone mothers' knowledge by writing in a style that would surprise the reader, shake up tradition, push the boundaries of our comfort zones, and make the reader sit up and take notice. At the time, the team did not characterize what we were doing as transgressive—we were attempting to be more inclusive in our writing activities (GRINGERI, WAHAB & ANDERSON-NATHE et al., 2010). To use Laurel RICHARDSON's words, we were responding to a "crisis of representation" (ELLIS et al., 2008, p.265). [32]

From the outset the writing process was collaborative. The three academic-researchers and one lone mother community-researcher who declared an interest and could make the time met one winter morning in 2012. We brought muffins and made coffee and we talked. It was hard. It was long. And it was interspersed with lots of laughter. Brenda's powerful words[4] (cited both here and in the companion article) captured the raw essence of the problem. Eventually, we agreed upon a key message—the complexities of negotiating power when constructing lone mothers' narratives. We also agreed that our article would reflect our differing perspectives. [33]

How was the written text generated? We broke the key message into doable chunks with each person plugging her name into a section she wanted to write. Each author took on the tasks she felt able to do. Sometimes, we wrote alone; at other times, we shared the work with one or two others. Some of us drew on notes generated during the research journey; Brenda, in particular, drew heavily on a journal she had kept during the project. We wrote in first, rather than third person. We used active, rather than passive voice to add punch and to emotionally engage the reader. We used a conversational, rather than a dense academic tone. Because we privileged lived experience as a legitimate way of knowing, we didn't feel the need to validate our experience by referencing the works of published "experts." Therefore, our initial bibliography was much shorter than the typical journal article. More about this later in the section on institutional barriers. [34]

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4   We do not intend to generalize to all community-researchers involved with this project as some had quite a different relationship to, and experience with the project.

There were three layers to what we ultimately described in our companion article as *My Story/Our Story/Shared Story* (GUSTAFSON et al., 2016). In the section titled *My Story*, Brenda described her experience as a community-researcher working with the team and her evolving self-perception and sense of empowerment. In the *Our Story* section, each author reflected on what we had learned from each other about building alliances and negotiating power. The article also reflected our shared story—a complicated composite of our differing views on the possibility of genuine power-sharing. [35]

Our commitment to the *My Story/Our Story/Shared Story* structure meant the article did not conform to the traditional format of a peer-reviewed article (i.e., introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, discussion). While there was a logical flow, there was no single linear argument as in common in traditional scholarship. Carolyn ELLIS and colleagues multivoiced ethnography published three years after ours took a similar form. Their writing, like ours, is a "form of collective consciousness" that is not "any one person's story; it's our story. And now it is yours" (2018, p.131). [36]

Another distinctive feature was the form or layout of the text. Each subsection began with the name of the person(s) who had written it. This feature recognized and gave equal value to the contribution of each individual author. Unlike traditional manuscripts that list the names of the authors as if each person wrote every word and shared a single voice, our format made individual voices visible and allowed each person to own their own space in the narrative (SIMON, 2013). To be clear, this is not a matter of *giving voice* to community members of the research team, for academic members have no legitimate claim to the power to do so (GILL, PURRU & LIN, 2012; JANES, 2016a). No one had final say in how the research process was laid bare for the reader. Instead we tried, with each iteration of the draft, to ensure that we understood and were responding to each other's intended message. In the end, the text read like a conversation, not unlike the form Richard WINTER and Graham BADLEY (2007) advocated. [37]

Choosing the right audience for our work was also important (FLICKER & NIXON, 2016). We identified a journal that explicitly welcomed creative approaches to issues of concern to social workers and their clients. That journal also appreciated an informed feminist perspective on research. We submitted our work to the journal with fingers crossed. [38]

Typically, a journal editor makes an initial assessment of a manuscript to determine if the content is appropriate for the journal audience and meets minimum standards for quality. From there, the manuscript is sent out to a minimum of two scholars who are regarded as experts in the theory, methodology and/or substantive areas covered in the manuscript. Normally, an author can track the progress of a manuscript on a journal's website. [39]

We were gratified by the positive response from the anonymous peer reviewers. We share a comment from one reviewer to illustrate the potential impact of writing differently.

"This is a powerful article. The authors boldly take the reader into uncomfortable and often taboo terrain. Vexing questions about the use of power in uneven power relationships are carefully yet directly confronted. The story and the form of the piece combine to present a poetic coherence." [40]

These comments affirmed our belief that we could stay true to our points of divergence and commonality by expressing our creative selves in a form that might be called scholarly storytelling. [41]

The reviewers did ask for more details. One asked us, to "dive deeper into the dark waters of strained relationships and unintended hurt." Another asked us to consider "how to tend to relationships with one another while these questions and issues of power remain messy and difficult?" When we met face-to-face again over coffee and muffins to plan our response to the reviewers' comments, it was clear that we didn't agree on how to theorize power or how others might navigate these waters more successfully. We decided that not agreeing was okay and that our article had to reflect our respect for each other's opinion. Here is an extended example of our differing perspectives on the messiness and difficulty of negotiating power relations:

"*Diana:* ... To me this means looking at power and praxis or the gaps between the theory of power relations and the work of enacting the principles of PAR. In our most recent meeting to discuss revisions to the manuscript, I was struck by the language each of us chose and the assumptions underpinning these linguistic choices. What does it mean when one of us talks about power sharing? Power as a resource? ...

Janice: ... Tensions are inherent in anti-oppressive work, which builds upon modernist conceptions of power as a commodity, but which has developed alongside the growing influence of postmodern understandings of power as a fluid and dynamic practice. Such understandings may lead us to consider strategies for wielding, yielding, or sharing power, when perhaps none of these strategies is sufficient for engaging with the complexity of power. ...

Brenda: That's the thing with the project. Each person brought something unique to the table and each person got something unique from the experience. Participants appeared to have similar social location, but in reality, we were all in different personal locations and had different perspectives. Our experience of inclusion and power sharing would, of course then, be different for each of us. ...

Diana/Janice/Tracy: ... Over time, project partners have developed a strong foundation of mutual trust and genuine respect for the unique gifts each person brings to the work. This foundation sustains us as we navigate the difficult times when actions fall short of ideals and we disappoint one another and sometimes ourselves. ... While the lone mother RAs' involvement and sense of inclusion increased over time, as did academic partners' deepening insight into the complexity of power dynamics, all struggled with the uncomfortable realization that in research devoted to building social inclusion, achieving that lofty goal would only be partial" (GUSTAFSON et al., 2016, pp.311-312). [42]

While the academic-researchers wanted to imagine the possibility of genuine power-sharing and advancing equality, Brenda's words grounded us: "Could they [academic-researchers] have done anything to make me feel any differently? Not unless they possess a magic wand that could erase years of poverty, deprivation, and internalized stigma" (p.313). [43]

We were delighted when the journal accepted our revised manuscript. We didn't anticipate that we would face another challenge. [44]

4.3 The role of the editor and copyeditor

Some academic journals retain the expertise of a copyeditor. Unlike a general editor, their role is not to change meaning or content but to improve the style and formatting of a manuscript. Form shapes the kind of content that is written, and the format organizes how stories can be told (CRIMMINS, 2018; ELLIS et al., 2018). Therefore, when a copyeditor is expected to prepare proofs using traditional writing conventions, their changes to the form and format may alter the content and the story that authors of a transgressive text intend to tell. Thus, it was at this stage of copyediting that we, as a team, realized that how we chose to represent our findings was not simply creative, but was transgressive. Our manuscript stepped over conventional lines causing the copyeditor to step in and strike out what they understood as errors in the formatting of the text and in so doing, changed the meaning, power and clarity of our argument. [45]

What were those changes and how did they impact our argument? The copyeditor overrode our intentional formatting decision (where author names began each section) and changed the layout of our text to reflect a traditional manuscript. Each author-named section was treated in the way that quotations from study participants are typically formatted. In other words, paragraphs that began with the author's name were assumed to be a participant quotation and switched to a smaller font size, indented and separated with extra spacing from subsequent paragraphs, which were assumed to be scholarly text discussing the quote. We doubt any reader would have been able to make sense of the article in the revised form. [46]

In another instance, the copyeditor combined a single sentence paragraph with the paragraph that followed it. Writing traditions stipulate that a paragraph should be three to eight sentences long. A single sentence paragraph breaks that rule. Our purpose in presenting a provocative statement as a stand-alone paragraph was to cause the reader to pause and reflect. Thus, merging the two paragraphs changed the emotional impact of that narrative turn. [47]

We appreciate that copyeditors perform an important and details-oriented job under sometimes precarious conditions. Our intention is not to call out individual copyeditors or devalue their work. Traditional scholarly writing conventions organize the work they must do. This implicates them as unwitting enforcers of disciplinary rules that may be at odds with the epistemic intentions of PAR researchers and writers. When the copyeditor changed the form of our

manuscript, they affected the content. Changing the format of a manuscript altered how our story was told. [48]

We faced one final challenge. Traditionally, authors are only given one opportunity to make changes to the proofs. Therefore, when resubmitting the corrected proofs Diana, as corresponding author, did not tick the box agreeing to that stipulation. Instead, she sent a separate e-mail requesting that the entire article be restored to the original layout and a second set of proofs returned to us for review before the manuscript went to print. The journal acknowledged receipt of the e-mail. [49]

The next e-mail Diana received was one with a link to the published article. Thankfully, the layout of article was (mostly) as we had intended. However, this decision on the part of the editor was another indicator of the institutionalized practices that limit the power of authors in the process of sharing and producing knowledge. [50]

5. The Benefits of Writing to Transgress

Disseminating findings in a respectful and appropriate way is one of the most important aspects of PAR (FORCHUK & MEIER, 2014). Participatory approaches to community-engaged research have the potential to democratize and decolonize knowledge production (FISHER et al., 2015; JANES, 2016a). To be effective material practices must match discursive claims to involve academic- and community-researchers in all aspects of the research process, including the dissemination of results. Our approach to writing the companion article emerged from a collective desire to be transparent about our process and to create a knowledge product in which a lone mother's voice was an active presence. When reflecting on the case study, we identified several benefits of writing to transgress traditional rules for scholarly publication. [51]

5.1 Enacting political commitment

Writing products reflect an author's beliefs. Thus, writing is political, if not by explicit intention, then by impact (ELLIS et al., 2008). As Leeat GRANEK and Ora NAKASH (2015) point out, qualitative researchers have an obligation to "think deeply about not only what we research but also the ways in which we translate that knowledge" (p.430).[5] In this case, our team was committed to building social inclusion and to challenging narratives about lone mothers who receive income support. Writing differently helped us to enact our political commitment to a non-hierarchical approach to research that extended to the dissemination of findings. Our collaborative writing process, our choice of message—the complexities of negotiating power—and the transgressive textual form of that message illustrated our commitment. [52]

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5   The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (2016) knowledge translation document retrieved from http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/29418.html#2 defines KT or knowledge translation as "a dynamic and iterative process that includes synthesis, dissemination, exchange and ethically-sound application of knowledge."

We explicitly linked the process of writing with our epistemological concerns as PAR researchers (what counts as knowledge? who can know? what can be known? and how do these questions link to concepts of truth, belief and verification, justification and trustworthiness?). Lone mothers' voices have been silenced (or at the very least muffled) in the literature despite the amount of scholarship quoting their words, discussing their experiences and theorizing their lives (see, for example, LEVAC, 2013; WILLIAMS et al., 2012). As Gail CRIMMINS observes, "we smother and Other when we lay our texts/words over the voice/s of research participants" (2018, p.16). [53]

In the companion article, a lone mother was an active and named author rather than an appropriated voice that appeared in a quotation filtered through an academic lens. Engaging Brenda in the process of writing and attaching her name to the sections she wrote made her a visible actor in the production of knowledge about her and her experiences. At the same time, we challenged tropes that subordinate lone mothers living in poverty. We see this as an important contribution to feminist work. [54]

5.2 Addressing PAR paralysis

Feminists who engage in PAR can experience a kind of paralysis when trying to advance equity and enact genuine power-sharing while operating within the patriarchal, racializing, ableist and classed institutions to which they are accountable (GUSTAFSON & BRUNGER, 2014). Each PAR project is unique, and therefore, full and equal participation of all team members may not, in every case, translate into participating in all activities equally (SMITH et al., 2010). Such decisions must be made collectively with attention to members' interests and abilities and the ways that power and control are entwined in these choices. Cheryl FORCHUK and Amanda MEIER (2014) propose an "Article Idea Chart" as one tool for engaging partners in writing about the issues important to individual members. [55]

Writing to transgress helped our team explore an antidote for PAR paralysis. Not only did we find a way to successfully navigate one institutional space—the publication arena—but we experienced a measure of satisfaction in being able to move forward in the absence of Brenda's "magic wand" (GUSTAFSON et al., 2016, p.313). We cannot erase years of poverty, deprivation and internalized stigma but we can engage in academic discourse with community-researchers in ways that enable each of us to own and share our individual story using our own words. [56]

5.3 Advancing critical self-awareness

Writing to transgress involves more than challenging institutionalized rules for knowledge production. It also has the potential to focus attention inward on those academic values and beliefs that academics have internalized. For us, this meant re-assessing our individual and collective priorities. Janice had to wrestle with her desire to produce a consistent narrative with a clear direction while still embracing the messiness and ambiguity of incorporating our divergent perspectives. Diana tends to be a bit compulsive when it comes to following rules about grammar and formatting, so it required some introspection and respectful restraint for her to share writing space and style. As a group, we agreed that it was more important to tell the story in the way that was authentic and consistent with our feminist goals and let the academic chips fall where they may. Martha MONTELLO's words about life-writing seem appropriate here:

> "For readers, so-called 'life writing' must ultimately be judged by the same criteria by which we judge fiction. We look for two strong moral values: 1) a profound respect for the characters and 2) a deep sense of purpose from which the telling arises" (2006, p.47). [57]

Having said that, we acknowledge that reflexivity can be an expression of privilege (PEASE, 2010). In other words, having the time to critically reflect on process may be a luxury that is more available to some than others depending on their social location. When Diana was a lone mother, she had little time for self-conscious navel-gazing when she was burdened by everyday challenges such as childcare, laundry, and stretching a too-small budget. Her life was already messy without inviting what Wanda PILLOW (2003) refers to as the "reflexivities of discomfort" (p.175), which is characterized by disruptions, messiness, the unfamiliar and the uncomfortable. Now that she works as an academic, Diana had the luxury of pausing to reflect and put those thoughts on paper. [58]

The four co-authors of the companion article used the writing process to reflect on and theorize power relations. What made our process distinct from collaborative writing processes undertaken by other research teams was the way we revealed our work of knowledge production. We brought it forward, making it visible in the content and the format of our writing. We didn't advance a universal claim or suggest that we had reached consensus. In this way, we allowed our concluding thoughts to reflect our differing realities and social positions. [59]

5.4 Engaging in mutual learning and interpersonal forgiveness

One outcome of a collaborative writing process is the potential for engaging in mutual learning and interpersonal forgiveness. We agree with Richard WINTER and Graham BADLEY (2007) who suggest that academic writing can contribute to personal enhancement and growth. For us, there was educative value in learning about each other more deeply and how we enacted the politics of knowledge production. Part of that learning was witnessing the anger and hurt that each of us bore; to see that our best intentions fell far short. "We could have done this better had we [academics] known at the beginning what they [lone mother RAs] had taught us by the end!" (GUSTAFSON et al., 2016, p.312) Writing together was a way to capture in our own words that emotional tension. "Owning" a section gave each of us the freedom to tackle the issue using our own distinct authorial voice. Thus, writing to transgress became a gift of cooperation and contributed to greater understanding and interpersonal forgiveness. [60]

5.5 Exploring the creative self

Writing to transgress allowed us to explore the creative self and invest more of our personal selves in the text. Without the restriction imposed by scholarly formatting rules, we were able to set aside academese or what Kari LERUM calls "linguistic armor" in favor of a more conversational tone (2001, p.470). We believe that the previously cited reviewers' comments illustrate how writing differently made our work more accessible and sculpted more vivid images of how research impacts the lives of academic- and community-partners. [61]

Exploring our creative selves also impacted us as researchers. As academic-researchers we are far less likely to expose our subjectivities to the same degree that we expose those of our community-based partners. Brenda's provocative statement about how it felt to be the "poster child" for lone mothers conveyed her strong and conflicting feelings about her participation in the project (GUSTAFSON et al., 2016, p.311). Janice, Tracy and Diana responded to Brenda's feelings by taking responsibility for our missteps in a section that bore our names as authors. [62]

In practice, this also meant that we respected each other's linguistic choices and, in most cases, we successfully resisted the urge to edit each other's words. This is a simple but important example of how we respected our differing creative selves and intellectual perspectives. [63]

6. Writing to Transgress Isn't Easy

In this section, we discuss the riskiness of challenging scholarly tradition and the institutionalized impediments to transgressive writing. We also consider some potential moral and ethical concerns. [64]

6.1 Institutional barriers

Not every writing venture will lend itself to transgressive writing. We acknowledge the paradox that this article represents, just as Julia JANES' (2016a) made a similar observation about her thesis. We are keenly aware that this manuscript adheres to some of the traditional rules for scholarly writing and represents precisely what Brenda railed against—the privileging of the academic voice. Note our introduction with a list of objectives, an overview of the case study, a discussion of strengths and limitations and a tidy conclusion, all assertions supported with references to the literature. We found it understandable and yet ironic, therefore, when an anonymous reviewer of an earlier draft of this article submitted to a different journal questioned the structure of the paper—a paper that was challenging the power-knowledge nexus and conventional writing practices. The reviewer asked for a "literature review of other works that grapple with the dilemmas and potential contradictions present in producing academic products." [65]

In revising for resubmission that draft (not significantly different from the form and format of this one) we added significant bulk to the references supporting our argument. We will never know if our failure to include a discrete literature review section as the reviewer requested was the reason the submission was ultimately rejected by the editor. Even though academics may call into question those hierarchies that govern and constrain our ability to work more authentically with community partners, we cannot always operate outside institutionalized power that prescribes how a scholarly paper should look and what needs to be included. [66]

Research partners must also adhere to the regulations of funders, research ethics boards and journal editorial boards. These institutional and funding structures too often relegate community partners to informal roles in support of the academic leads (GILL et al., 2012). Negotiating these roles involves addressing power relations. The hierarchical nature of the academic world makes it difficult to advance toward democratization of knowledge production. Who is driving the bus? Who has the power to speak? Whose voice is acknowledged as "the voice" of the article? [67]

In the *Lone Mothers: Building Social Inclusion* study, as in many other PAR projects, the characterization of academics as "researchers" and members of marginalized communities as "research assistants" made clear but often inaccurate distinctions between the contributions of team members. Such distinctions underscored the expectation that lone mothers remain in a subordinate position, and silently infused the research project and its knowledge products. The taken-for-grantedness of language choices illustrates the

difficulties that academics must address when we presume to be able to divest ourselves of our privileged position. [68]

Additionally, when communicating with journals, the practically useful rule that one author must be identified as "first author" or "corresponding author" and assume responsibility for communication with journals, simultaneously hinders the democratization of knowledge production and dissemination. One possible solution may be to form a writing group that becomes the *de facto* author of works generated by a project. We offer two examples of this type of collaboration that may be worth revisiting: In 1989, the PERSONAL NARRATIVES GROUP published an edited collection of stories exploring women's lives through a feminist lens. Similarly, the FEMINIST HEALTH CARE ETHICS RESEARCH NETWORK (1998) explored issues of autonomy and agency in a collection of essays about the politics of women's health. [69]

6.2 Risking credibility

Novice academic-researchers are expected to learn to write and follow established rules when submitting work for publication (ELLIS et al., 2008; TRIBBLE & WINGATE, 2013). Those who fail to observe these rules risk not getting published in leading journals or in any journal; in turn, they risk not getting future funding without a demonstrated track record of publications in respected outlets (FLICKER & NIXON, 2016; GRANEK & NAKASH, 2015; VERED, 2016). Academics also risk scholarly respectability, for engaging in so-called soft research, for producing knowledge that is not considered scientific, and for writing in a narrative style that is considered "confessional" or "common" (PEASE, 2010, p.3). [70]

The other risk is that work will be critiqued as overtly political. For academic-researchers, work that is maligned as political is considered less scholarly or scientific and is taken less seriously by our colleagues, by peer reviewers, publication outlets, tenure and promotion boards and granting agencies. The irony for those of us whose work emerges from a critical realist stance is that we would regard that as a *good* thing that is consistent with our epistemic stance. For community-researchers whose work intends to be political and transformative, the academic environment has long represented an extreme form of not being taken seriously. [71]

Writing to transgress is a risky way to express political perspectives in a context that has traditionally excluded experiential or creative, arts-based or values-driven knowledge on the basis of merit (BOYDELL et al., 2016). Less obvious, perhaps, is the risk that efforts to engage in acceptable defiance may be devalued as an effort to engage in some new kind of "hipness."[6] This critique may be leveled by academics that reject non-traditional writing as well as by community-researchers who see transgressive writing as a questionable attempt to be cool. [72]

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6   We thank Valerie WEBBER for offering this insightful comment at a talk given at Concordia University, Montreal in June 2016.

6.3 Practical costs

Writing to transgress also has practical costs. It takes time to identify writing partners who are willing and able to invest energy in critical thinking and the act of writing. For Brenda, participating in such work is an add-on to an already hectic schedule. Co-authoring an article for publication takes more time and energy than writing alone. There must be a negotiation of content, theoretical framing, writing styles, language choices, formatting, author naming and order, and publication outlet. Such practical considerations may result in a continuous and exhausting process of re-visiting and re-negotiating identities and relationships in community-university research alliances. Taking too much time to write an article means missing deadlines for conferences and other dissemination outlets. Eventually data get old, stories evolve, and once-novel insights become yesterday's news. Consider that this article and the companion piece each took over three years to write and publish. [73]

There may also be tension in the goals of academic- and community-researchers. The individualistic goals and modes of engaging in research and knowledge production valued in academia may not advance the goals of the community. Community partners may regard academic publications as inaccessible documents that steal time and resources from other, more meaningful frontline and advocacy activities (FLICKER & NIXON, 2016; JANES, 2016a). [74]

Another practical cost is to professional and personal identities of all authors. When we write to transgress, we are engaging in a process that can lead to what bell hooks calls, "critical awareness of the self" (HOOKS, 1994, p.14). By privileging subjectivity, reflexivity and voice in our writing we expose our errors and ourselves, not just to each other, but to all who read our work. The risk to academic partners seems obvious: we open ourselves to critiques of our scientific process and our knowledge products. While academics may risk being taken seriously, community partners may risk much more when they publicly share their life stories. Brenda's feeling of being a "poster child" for lone mothers is a telling example. [75]

6.4 Ethical and moral considerations

The writing space can be yet another venue for reproducing exploitative relationships. The team must consider the ethical and moral implications that writing imposes on community members who may have little time and energy to spare and who may derive little, if any, direct benefit from such ventures (YEN-KOHL & THE NEWTOWN FLORIST CLUB WRITING COLLECTIVE, 2016). It may be a good thing to engage community partners in writing their own stories because it circumvents moral concerns about Othering when academics narrate other people's stories (ELLIS, 2007). At the same time, including community-researchers in writing may be considered exploitative if they are treated as a literary commodity without the protection of ethical regulations for this practice (COUSER as cited in MONTELLO, 2006, p.47). [76]

7. Summary Thoughts

Do the traditional rules for scholarly writing and argumentation reflect the epistemic stance of feminist PAR researchers? We think not. This case study illustrates the disjuncture between the epistemic stance of critical realists and the scholarly products we are too often expected to produce. Feminist PAR is typically motivated by a desire to, amongst other goals, destabilize and change the way that power relations are structured in research endeavors (GILL et al., 2012). However, the hierarchical process of writing and the traditional rules for knowledge production that organize the structure and textual form of scientific knowledge are reinforced in the publication arena. We offer our experience as a response to Leeat GRANEK and Ora NAKASH's (2015) call to identify strategies for working differently. We acknowledge that these reflections on our experience are grounded in a single case: one article concerning a feminist PAR project about lone mothers' social exclusion. Nonetheless, we believe that these ideas and practices are potentially relevant to researchers across a range of scholarly work. Moreover, our act of writing differently aligns with efforts that are emerging in other disciplines that challenge how researchers represent knowledge (see, for example, CRIMMINS, 2018; FISHER et al., 2015; LIVHOLTS, 2012). [77]

What does it mean to transgress traditional rules for scholarly writing? Writing to transgress is about how we write and with whom, and how that process is made visible in the knowledge we produce. This act provides us a means, as critics and commentators, to expose an infrequently addressed systemic challenge to engaging in feminist PAR. The expectation that PAR researchers must adhere to writing conventions can be read as a reflection of power and control operating to retain the status quo in the production and sharing of knowledge (JANES, 2016a). Our discussion adds to the current literature that focuses on other institutional barriers that exist within Research Ethics Boards, university structures and funding agencies. [78]

What are the benefits of writing to transgress? Representing knowledge in ways that step over traditional boundaries for writing is transgressive, complex, challenging, and potentially rewarding and liberatory. Naomi WALLACE (2008) notes that to transgress, and to promote transgression in others is an act of courage. So, we want to *en-courage* other academic- and community-researchers to engage in a small act of scholarly transgression. Let's reimagine collaboration in the ways we share our research findings and in how we publish our work. Let's enjoy the opportunities that transgressing institutionalized and internalized rules for writing might afford us, particularly for challenging the status quo that continues to silence lone mothers living in poverty, excluding them from narrating their own lives. With each new opportunity to write against the rules, we advance our personal growth and development as community- and academic-researchers, and the knowledge produced through that act. The companion article we examine here conveyed a deep respect for lone mothers raising families in poverty, and our intent to both valorize and operationalize subjectivity, reciprocity, critical reflexivity, voice and equity in our work together. [79]

What ethical and practical concerns are exposed when we challenge traditional boundaries for knowledge production and scholarly writing? Make no mistake; transgressive writing will not resolve the persistent tension between the discursive goals of feminist PAR and the practical goals of producing and disseminating knowledge. It would be naïve to suggest that institutionalized barriers can be erased simply because they have been identified as perpetuating oppressive hierarchies. Nor does it mean that we must accept them. To correct the traditional erasure of lone mothers' (and other marginalized) voices from the discourse concerning them, we call for a deliberate extension of PAR methodology to the entire knowledge production and dissemination plan. [80]

Acknowledgments

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