



The Immobilities of Gender-Based Violence in Lockdown: Devising Workshops to Support Women Who Experienced Gender-Based Violence During the COVID-19 Pandemic to Tell and Share Their Stories

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Abstract

This article reports on a UK-wide, transdisciplinary project between creative writers and social scientists that was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), exploring how storytelling workshops with women who experienced gender-based violence (GBV) in lockdown could be used to inform and change social and legal policies. The article is split into two sections: in the first, we give an outline of the project and how the creative workshops were devised, and in the second, we adopt a trioethnographic stance, enabling us to contextualise and present our dialogues that 1) reflect on our lived experience of devising the workshops and 2) draw on interview data with writers and artists who co-led the project to make recommendations for workshop facilitation with people who have experienced GBV.

Keywords: gender-based violence, creative writing workshops, trioethnography, storytelling for change

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Introduction

The telling and sharing of stories is at the heart of what it is to be human, helping us understand, connect, and even make sense of the chaotic and confusing. Qualitative research has always valued creative, evocative, and personal narratives (Gilbert, 2002), but conventional approaches to this research relies on 'postpositivist claims for developing knowledge (i.e., cause and effect thinking, reduction to specific variables and hypotheses and questions, use of measurement and observation, and the test of theories)' (Creswell, 2003, p. 18) and many peer-reviewed journals still struggle to put an emphasis on stories or see them as equal to empirical data. This article reports on a transdisciplinary project between creative writers and social scientists that was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and explored how storytelling workshops with women who experienced gender-based violence (GBV) in lockdown might contribute to meaningful societal change. By merging storytelling approaches and data analysis, the project sought to support women who had experienced GBV in lockdown to tell their stories using image and text and then analyse these stories as data that might be used to inform and change legal and social policies around GBV.

We use the UN Women definition (n.d.) of GBV:

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to harmful acts directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms. The term is primarily used to underscore the fact that structural, gender-based power differentials place women and girls at risk for multiple forms of violence. While women and girls suffer disproportionately from GBV, men and boys can also be targeted. The term is also sometimes used to describe targeted violence against LGBTQI+ populations, when referencing violence related to norms of masculinity/femininity and/or gender norms.

This article is in two parts: in the first, we give an outline of the project, ethical considerations and how the creative workshops were devised, and in the second, we adopt a trioethnographic stance (Rogers-Shaw et al., 2021). Trioethnography is an evolution of duoethnography (Norris & Sawyer, 2012) and enables us to contextualise and present our dialogues that 1) reflect on our lived experience of devising the workshops and 2) draw on interview data with writers and artists who co-led the project to make recommendations for workshop facilitation. We reflect on our lived experience of the project and our analysis of interview data with the other

workshop facilitators to make recommendations for devising workshops with people who have experienced GBV during the pandemic.

About Trioethnography

Autoethnography as a methodology often seeks to value creative and evocative storytelling in academic research including stories about problematic life events and trauma (Moriarty, 2013). As Carolyn Ellis, says in her methodological novel, *The Ethnographic I*, autoethnography is 'research, writing, story [*graphy*], and method that connect the autobiographical [*auto*] and personal to the cultural, social and political [*ethno*]' (Ellis, 2004, p. xix). The forms used in autoethnography can include emotion, introspection, dialogue, story, scenes and borrow techniques from literary writing. In this way, autoethnography disrupts traditional academic writing traditions.

In the *Handbook of Autoethnography* Holman Jones, Adams., & Ellis (2013, p. 32) identify five purposes for autoethnographic work:

1. disrupting norms or research practice and representation
2. working from insider knowledge
3. manoeuvring through pain, confusion, anger, and uncertainty
4. breaking silence/(re)claiming voice
5. making work accessible

Marylin Metta states, writing can act as a tool to speak out and resist 'the many layers of silence and oppression associated with racism, sexism and domestic violence' (Metta, 2010, p. 32) and that, 'Women's autoethnographic writings provide critical spaces for women's silenced experiences, voices, stories to be told, mapped and shared, and hence, contribute to the ways in which we make knowledge about the world and senses of our place in it' (p. 491).

Duoethnographies take this work one step further and offer a critically reflexive dialogue that draws on specific elements from each author's life in relation to the area being researched (Latz & Murray, 2012), akin to the collaborative dialogues evident in duoethnographic and autoethnographic work (Grant & Radcliffe, 2015; Grant & Zeeman, 2012). Where there are multiple, polyvocal perspectives for both the writers and readers and all are invited to enter the conversation. We all internalise scripts (Sawyer & Norris, 2012) and as experienced workshop leaders, methods for delivery. This way of working both challenges and deepens our practice as

workshop leaders—as we position ourselves within the polyvocal text, we come up with new nuanced questions and more ethical ways of working. We refer to our work as *trioethnography* to acknowledge the equal participation of the three researchers and to value our collective experience. To break that down and explain further, ‘trio’ is the three authors reflecting on their experience of this project, ‘ethno’ the workshop facilitators working with people who have experienced GBV, and ‘graphy’ the contextual research on GBV and autoethnography as a methodology that can support workshop facilitators to develop their practice.

This approach is relevant here as the authors are concerned with their lived experience of this project and expertise as workshops leaders and seek to share this via an evocative text. It is also a creative response that values lived experience, and it is hoped that this method will be of relevance and interest to Lapidus readers.

The Immobilities of Gender-Based Violence in Lockdown – An AHRC Funded Project

An aspect of GBV that soon rose to public consciousness during the pandemic was the terrifying rise in domestic abuse, with a 700% increase in helpline calls reported by UK’s largest domestic abuse charity, Refuge, while a separate helpline for perpetrators of domestic abuse seeking help to change their behaviour received 25% more calls after the start of the COVID-19 lockdown (Townsend, 2020). The AHRC project identified storytelling as a vehicle for change and was concerned with offering survivors of GBV dedicated time as well as safe and supportive space and methods and techniques to tell their autobiographical experiences in a variety of ways and employ literary techniques that might help them (and readers of the texts) to feel differently about the stories being told (Hunt, 2000). Stories have the ability to provide insights into contextual circumstances most people may not have experienced first hand (Mattingly & Garro, 2001) and research exploring human stories is often considered as the ‘flip-side’ of established academic debates (Bamburg, 2004). Stories are able to challenge dominant societal narratives and ‘carry rhetorical weight’ (Mattingly & Garro, 2001), all of which makes it highly appropriate for feminist qualitative research seeking to challenge patriarchal and misogynistic discourse.

The project was structured in several stages:

1. Plan a series of workshops led by writers and artists that would support people who had experienced GBV in lockdown to tell and share stories in a supportive online space.
2. Recruit people to take part in the workshops via a dedicated website where their informed consent would be gained before taking part.
3. Run workshops and ask participants to submit stories they created via the website.
4. Project leaders to analyse the stories and make recommendations to inform and change social policies via a series of policy advisor workshops with representatives from the police, health, charities and academia.
5. Disseminate the project via conferences, articles, and events.

The authors were involved in all aspects of the project, and in this article, we share our experiences of devising the workshops and make recommendations for other workshop leaders based on interview data with the writers and artists who co-led the workshops.

The Creative Workshops

The project aimed to recruit people living in the UK who had experienced GBV during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were recruited via a website, as well as emails via specific organisations, groups, and social media. It was a rapid response pandemic project, which meant that time to build relationships and partnerships with existing projects were limited and also the series of workshops was necessarily a one-off.

Recruitment materials made it clear that this could include people who remembered past experiences during this time, as for many, the experience of being locked up and/or isolated was triggering (Braham et al., 2021) and the project wanted to engage with people who had re-remembered experiences of GBV during the pandemic.

Leaders of the creative workshops were recruited based on their experience of running workshops with vulnerable groups and their own practice exploring GBV. Specialisms included graphic novel, fine arts, autobiography, prose, stitch, and poetry. It was hoped that offering a range of storytelling, methods would allow participants to identify a mode of telling their story that felt accessible to them without privileging text,

which can alienate people, especially if they are being asked to write in a language that is not their first. A focus of the project was to include and value a diverse range of styles and stories that would make the workshops accessible and appealing to as many people as possible.

At the start of the project, it was decided that the workshop facilitators would have regular meetings to ensure that everyone felt connected and clear about the aims of the project and what each workshop might do. It was quickly agreed that certain ways of working were essential to make the participants and facilitators feel safe in the online workshops. These included:

1. Free counselling sessions available for anyone who took part, including the workshop facilitators.
2. No costs attached to any of the workshops; they were free to participants and included any materials, which were posted out prior to the events.
3. Training on how to use MS Teams where the online workshops would take place (due to restrictions during the pandemic).
4. No obligation to share or upload stories to the website; just taking part was absolutely fine.
5. Workshops booked via Eventbrite; consent had to be given before people could join the workshops.
6. A safety brief at the start of every session.
7. Regular check-in with workshop facilitators to discuss any issues, share concerns, and offer mutual support to each other.
8. The requirement that nobody could watch or listen in to the workshops unless actively taking part.

Ethics

The eight points of this safety framework fitted in with the Five Pillars of research in The Women's Aid Research Integrity Framework on Violence and Abuse (Williamson et al., 2020), which draws on feminist research practice since the 1970s. Even though the workshops and participants were not directly researched, we made it clear to all participants that the workshops were part of a research project (<https://immobsgbv.edublogs.org/participant-information/>), and we created three questions on the event-booking system for them to confirm that they understood that. If a participant submitted a story to the research

project, they were asked to fill in an accompanying form that detailed what the story would be used for and granting their permission. The project was approved by an ethics committee at the University of Brighton. The committee looked at issues such as wellbeing and support for participants, language used in publicity materials to invite participants to share their stories, networks and an advisory group for researchers, and anonymity as well as how the data would be stored and analysed.

Despite the collaborative discussions and clear commitment to ethical practice from all of the writers and artists, the workshops failed to recruit many people. For us as a project team, this was frustrating as the potential benefit of the workshops to support anyone affected by GBV during the pandemic seemed tangible. Why had we missed the mark and what, if anything, could be learnt from this experience?

What We Did

We all exchange stories to develop knowing and understanding, drawing on lived experiences to illustrate our professional practice and connect with others using evocative details about our personal lives (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2002). In qualitative research, work with an emphasis on autobiographical narratives is seen as equal to more conventional academic work (Denzin, 2003; Frank, 2002, 2010; Spry, 2011), and in this article, we have chosen to adopt trioethnography as an approach because it seeks to identify similarities and also differences in authors' experiences that can shed light on and explain events. Following on from our pre-workshop meetings once they had all been delivered, we arranged a recorded online conversation, with predetermined questions to offer structure and points to stay focussed, but also allow it to unfold naturally. This was then written up in a way that makes sense to a reader but also stays close to the live conversation. In this way, Mel's, Hannah's, and my experience of devising and running the workshops and interviewing other writers and artists involved has provided us with a living archive (Kitch, 2018) that we will now share as a dialogue, situating ourselves and our experiences of the project in order to disseminate our methods.

Trioethnography

Jess: It feels important to say something about our background coming into the immobilities of GBV project. I am principal lecturer in creative writing at the University of Brighton and co-director of a research centre in

arts and wellbeing. I have published on autoethnography, creative writing pedagogy, community engagement and now my new book is called *Walking for Creative Recovery* (Reading & Moriarty, 2022). When Professor Murray invited me to work on the project, it was based on my previous experience of working with women at RISE, a charity supporting people who have experienced domestic abuse. As part of this work, I led creative workshops with women who wanted to tell and share their stories of life after they had been through a therapeutic process as a result of their domestic abuse. I co-authored a chapter with one of the women and another with a colleague who worked on the project with me (Whittle & Moriarty, in press; Moriarty & Ashmore, 2019).

Mel: Thanks, Jess. I'm the research officer on the immobilities of gender-based violence project, and I have a background as a freelance writer. I have been writing about children and families for 20 years, and alongside this I gained an MA in creative writing in 2019 as well as devised and delivered creative writing workshops. My research values creativity, social change, and writing for wellbeing. Hannah is also a writer and an important contributor to the project.

Hannah: Thanks for inviting me to talk with you both. I'm a playwright, novelist, and short story writer. I have a PhD in creative and critical writing from the University of Sussex in 2018 and I was the Royal Literary Fund Fellow at The University of Brighton in 2020.

Jess: Let's begin by talking about how we developed the exercises for the workshops. What did you do differently for these workshops?

Hannah: I work with people who want to write stories from their lives, who are quite often writing about trauma, so the exercises for these workshops were developed from experience I've gained during the past four years. I was aware that there could be people with different levels of writing experience and people who wanted to express something difficult that had happened to them. So my exercises were geared towards this. My considerations were more about preparing for a short, one-off workshop with people who don't know each other, and these are considerations I would make no matter which group I'm encountering.

Mel: My workshop was a mix of writing and drawing. I was inviting people to consider, express, and represent place and what that meant to them by drawing and labelling a map, then to use this map to inspire writing (Turchi, 2004). I thought that some people might be more comfortable with writing and some with drawing, and so I broke each task

down into small steps so that everyone could participate at different entry points, no matter what their creative writing or workshop experience was.

Jess: The idea with the walking workshops was to give people an opportunity to take part in the place where they were living wasn't a safe space. It gave people an opportunity to take some time outside of their domestic lives. I also ran an objects workshop with Vanessa Marr, where we used stitch and photographs to inspire or express a story. On a previous project with RISE, Vanessa and I found that people used objects as stimulus or they would talk through the objects. We offered them a list of everyday things that could be interpreted metaphorically, for example a lost glove, an alarm clock, a reading lamp on a tidy desk. When preparing and delivering workshops, we always think about how we can make sure that everyone participates, and using objects seems to be a good leveller in this way too (Bolton, 2006).

Hannah: I think that point you raised about objects being a mediating factor for those participating is really useful, and in case it's not clear, I use texts in the same way. When you're looking at an object or an extract from a text, it takes those participants outside of their obligation to write or speak.

Jess: Do you mind if I check in with a follow up question? Did you both consciously choose texts that were or weren't explicitly about gender-based violence? What was your process?

Hannah: I chose a text that I always choose for new writers. It's a text where you are moving through a landscape, so it spoke to several themes I got from the brief, such as mobility and intergenerational. It's a female point of view and raises issues of class and violence, but in a contained way. It's not gender-based violence but it allowed that to come through in participants' responses if they wanted to. I felt it was a useful text in terms of what the writer does with her use of language and I thought it was flexible in terms of how a participant could interpret it with their own choice of language.

Mel: I chose texts which included walking too since my themes were mapping and place. I planned to tell participants they could choose any place, but suggested that it could be an imaginary place, a place from their past, a favourite or happy place. So I was giving participants a framework, technique, or idea to try out during the workshop with a safe topic that they could fictionalise if they wanted to (Deveney & Lawson, 2021) and

then they could then return to it after the workshop if they chose to work with more emotional topics.

Hannah: So as Mel is saying, the texts need to be suitable for a one-off workshop where you don't know how much writing has been done before. But I would always introduce it by saying, this could be emotionally challenging, take care of yourself. You don't have to do it.

Jess: I did this with my outside walking workshops. I deliberately picked texts and examples that were about the embodied experience of walking instead of anything to do with gender-based violence. As you say, I would always issue a guideline or warning at the beginning of an exercise or workshop because you just don't know what would be triggering for someone. And in the objects workshop, we did one of the exercises with a photograph that participants had chosen to bring with them. I offered two poems; one was very positive, uplifting, and warm, and the other had more upset in it. I didn't want people to feel that they had to share positive stories because they were in a workshop.

Hannah: Shall we talk about the café sessions as well? Alongside the workshops, we offered what we called *creative cafés*. These were one-to-one, online drop-in sessions with me, like a mentoring meeting. The conversations I had in these sessions were so enriching that I was disappointed with the lack of stories uploaded for research. The participants seemed pleased to have been offered the opportunity to talk about their creative work with me, and they were keen to share it too. They also shared work in the workshop. I couldn't see the faces of several participants as they had their cameras switched off, but even though they didn't switch their cameras on, they were very vocal. And one of them said that the exercise had led her to think about herself in a new way and that it was life changing. So, I felt as if people got a lot out of the sessions.

Mel: That happened in the collage workshop as well. I had email conversations afterwards with Miranda, the workshop leader, and participants who were making connections in a way they hadn't made before and said that it had shifted their thinking on certain things.

Hannah: But even with that personal impact, none of the participants uploaded their work to the research or filled in feedback forms? Maybe we can think about that when we talk about what we'd do differently next time. Maybe they felt differently when they were away from that very creative space. You know, it felt quite a joyful and very nurturing space to be in. Maybe away from that they felt less confident about uploading their

work or about what they had written. Or you know, maybe even what they learned about themselves. Or maybe they lost confidence and in another situation like this, we might say, 'Okay everyone upload your work now, it doesn't need to be finished or polished, we just want a record of the work we did together.' And we would reiterate that it's confidential.

Jess: What I'm hearing you say reminds me that mentoring is so important in writing (Davis et al., 2012). Not just workshops, but with one-to-one discussion of ideas too, especially women writers who maybe need more encouragement.

Hannah: It's like oxygen every time you feel heard and get a chance to talk to someone who understands.

Jess: It's a good point, and this is something worth thinking about for next steps as well. One of the participants in the RISE project went on to co-author an article with me, and this evolved into a sort of mentorship (Whittle & Moriarty, in press), since they were an artist anyway and had a creative practice and process. Thinking about how we could take forward this idea of mentorship and formalise it is important.

I wanted to ask you both how you felt about the fact that we ran the workshops online. If we did it again, would you rather run the workshops face to face?

Hannah: They would have been just as effective in person, but I think teaching, especially creative writing, works well online. But my preference would always be in person. My workshop was a group of eight, but only two of them kept their camera on, so an in-person experience would have been very different. That said they were from all over the country, and the same people wouldn't have been able to get together like that if they were in-person. So blended is best.

Mel: Yes, it's amazing to have people from different geographical locations all in one online space. Online is also more accessible for people with health conditions or caring responsibilities. And people might feel more comfortable being at home and knowing they could switch their camera off or leave at any time.

But face to face is different. As a facilitator, you can feel the emotions in the room. Being able to see people's body language while they are writing is so helpful for getting a sense of their experience. You can just go over to someone and check they understand what they are doing. The other thing I

missed about in-person workshops is those chats that happen in the kitchen or space just outside the workshop.

Hannah: Yeah, that informal sharing is so valuable, such as people swapping numbers and having a chat in the breaks.

Jess: And in person they can be more fully present. If someone has their camera off, I wonder if it's because they are half in this and half doing something else or if it's because they are finding it really difficult. Also, I know Microsoft Teams isn't as easy to use as it could be for people who come across it for the first time. If you're already apprehensive about joining a workshop, you don't want the technology to be a barrier as well.

Mel: Someone did leave one of the workshops because they were having problems with the technology. They emailed me to say they were dealing with too much that day and had tried, couldn't do it and didn't want to try any more.

Hannah: I would love to have delivered the workshop face to face as this allows for a more nuanced interaction and opportunities to be spontaneous and respond with a range of materials.

Jess: I'm interested in what we've been saying about establishing rapport, developing connections and trust, and how this can happen in an online space. One thing that worked really well is that Vanessa (my co-facilitator) and I were in the same room at the same time. This meant that we could both be interacting and break out into a smaller meeting if people had questions. So that felt positive.

Mel: It's about creating a safe space for people to share and feel supported. This is done in a number of ways: how you set it up, how you advertise it, the number of people you have in a room, the ground rules and introduction. And to have some kind of after care is good as well. Also, what I thought worked well from the outset of this project was being able to say that everyone (participants and workshop leaders) had access to a counsellor. We weren't sure how this would work with an online project to begin with, but we decided that the counsellor could be available after the workshops at a time that suited them and the participant. This meant that we were giving people the message that we were going to take care of them. We weren't just going in to take their stories and then head off again.

Hannah: Yeah, it felt positive for everyone in the group. And, as you say, for the workshop leader as much as for the participants. I remember when I heard there was going to be a counsellor, I felt relief. This isn't the

usual level of support for creative practitioners working with people's life stories or the arts and wellbeing sector (Naismith, 2019), so that was a good feature of this project.

Jess: We also had a counsellor on the RISE project (Moriarty & Ashmore, 2019). They took part in all of the writing exercises but didn't end up having to do any counselling.

Hannah: I wouldn't have thought of it if it hadn't been for this project. But if I ever teach life writing again, I'm going to demand it's part of the provision.

Jess: When we do life writing or autobiography on the degree courses at the university, I've never posted a link to the student support or guidance service, but I'm definitely going to start doing that. This seems important for everyone, not just people who've experienced gender-based violence. Is there anything that is particularly important for those people?

Hannah: I think what was helpful in the beginning was Miranda (at one of the pre-workshop meetings) mentioning that there might be somebody hovering outside the door that might make someone feel uncomfortable. And the safety issues that a participant might be on a phone or moving around or they might have to shut down their screen unexpectedly.

Mel: Miranda also said that the safeguarding guidelines are really important. For example, being able to share as much or as little as participants want, for them to be able to remain anonymous and use first names only. Also, some participants may feel that they have done enough, need to rest; and it would be good to know if any extra support is needed beforehand.

Hannah: Even with the safeguarding support in place, the topic of gender-based violence didn't come up at all, even though everyone knew the workshops were part of this research project. I wonder whether I judged it well enough in terms of holding the space open for them to do that or whether they never would have. Often in a two-year programme of life writing where people are sharing extremely personal and difficult material, it is the last session when someone comes out with something huge that they have been holding in for all of that time. And this is when they know the other people well and there is a good level of trust built up. We just didn't know how people would feel in a one-off online workshop.

Jess: I definitely wouldn't have encouraged anyone to talk about gender-based violence because we didn't know their backgrounds or where they were coming from. So one thing I would do differently next time is maybe have a combination of open workshops and also partner with a particular charity or support network so that we know people had been through a therapeutic process before coming to the workshops. Then we could say more explicitly that we were looking for stories of gender-based violence so that they were a bit more prepared. We could get advice from the organisation about what might work and which people might respond well to that kind of setting.

Mel: Yes, working with an organisation with an existing group would be helpful, although we were clear that the workshops were not going to be researched and that we were sharing tips and techniques for people to practice at home. But the workshops were still an element of our research project and we were hoping that people would want to upload their stories to share with the research.

Jess: Having said all of that, one strength of the project was the organisation. Thanks, Mel, for making sure that the website worked well, the information was accessible, and things like consent were really clear and articulated effectively.

Also, another thing I wouldn't change were the conversations we all had as facilitators leading up to the workshops, which is why we want to try and capture this conversation as both insight and research into what we did. At first, we didn't have many meetings booked in, but the discussion and camaraderie helped me feel much more at ease going into the workshops. Getting insights into what facilitators were doing will inform my future teaching. I feel as if my practice leading workshops is better, stronger, and more confident because of the time I got to spend with all of you.

Mel: I agree. We trusted all the workshop leaders with their expertise and the way they would run the workshops, and it was really helpful to meet and talk about these ethical issues such as how we would manage people sharing their stories in the workshops. I've been running creative writing workshops on my own for six years, and so just to be in this space where we could talk through these issues and think them through has been helpful and reassuring for me.

Hannah: It's been interesting as an interdisciplinary project. The idea of working in a social science context and having freedom to run creative workshops and then see how the data is used by social scientists is fascinating. I like that insight and use of our material.

Jess: I think all projects should probably have different eyes, different experiences, different backgrounds looking at whatever we're working on.

So, another question. What advice would you give to other people thinking of running creative workshops for people who have experienced gender-based violence?

Hannah: In any workshop where you're inviting people to write about their lived experience, it can be helpful to show that their written articulation of those experiences is separate from the person who had the experiences (Hunt & Sampson, 1998). It's so valuable for the participants to know that they may be writing about something that happened to them, but when they write it down, it's happening to a written version of them on the page, which is separate.

This enables you to talk about the writing and not the experience. Instead of reactions of sympathy from the other participants, you can talk about how a particular word makes you think of something or make suggestions about different ways to structure a scene.

Mel: One of the things I say at the start of a workshop is that we're going to treat everything as fiction unless you tell us otherwise (Schneider, 2003). This is to allow people to feel free to write what comes to mind without judgement. And even if something did happen to you, the writing could be a fictionalisation of that experience.

Hannah: I think that can be a little tricky because then a participant might feel as if they are not being heard. Even though this is a creative writing space and not a therapeutic space, there can be therapeutic outcomes (Hunt, 2000; Pennebaker, 2000). Since this is a creative writing space, it's not about getting something out; it's about crafting something and to do this you have to treat it as separate from the person who's had the lived experience.

My advice to put this into practice for other people running workshops would be to refer to the character when you're talking about a piece of writing, or the narrator, even if they are using 'I' in the first person. This creates a layer of distance.

Jess: This is important, and I slip up sometimes. I think you can see the relief on people's faces when they expose something difficult that has happened to them, and the workshop leader refers to the narrator as the character.

Hannah: In an in-person situation, you can just see it fall away from their body. It's actually a very moving thing. And then sometimes the other participants want to talk about it, and you can see them tightening up. Their body language shifts when someone hasn't respected what they are sharing.

Mel: The most important thing for me is to create trust and a safe space for people to be able to try things out. Creative workshops can be so validating and reassuring for people and a great way to help them process life experiences, with or without therapeutic outcomes.

Hannah: Creativity is important and something that's getting sidelined more and more, so I'd like to tell policy makers to do more creative work. Workshops are actually providing another layer of support that might not be counselling but may have therapeutic properties and are hopefully something that organisations can resource (Bolton, 2011).

Jess: Storytelling, as well as creativity in general, is important because a lot of people that have experienced gender-based violence have been asked to tell their story over and over again. Whether it's to police or policy organisations or charities to access funding and housing, which means they have to tell their story in a particular way. What we're trying to do is to give them time and space to tell their story in a way that feels pleasurable and motivating. It's about how they want to express themselves and imbuing it with imagination and literary techniques. This can be incredibly empowering and a way of saying, *This is my story. This is the story I wanted to write. And this is the story I feel happy with.*

Hannah: Robert Olen Butler, in his book *From Where You Dream* (2006), has an exercise called The Anecdote Exercise, which is exactly what you are talking about. We'll configure certain stories and we'll tell them in certain ways because we're telling them over and over. And actually, a creative workshop, whether it is making a duster, going for a walk in the woods, or drawing a cartoon, invites a participant to unpick that story and tell it in a fresh way that then enables them to gain control over it or make them feel empowered in a way that they weren't during the experience that they are writing or creating about.

Jess: Valuing imagination and creativity is potentially really useful for policy makers to think about. What really strikes me is that we should get the policy makers doing some creative writing as well. Maybe this will remind some of them how powerful storytelling can be and what it can reveal. It puts us in touch with not just our humanity but other people's as well. And that's got to be what matters.

Mel: Yes, definitely! Thank you both for making the time to talk about the creative workshops today. It's been such a valuable conversation, which has reassured me that the thought we all put in to creating the workshops has been worthwhile and it has also given me plenty of inspiration. Each workshop we plan and run and each conversation we have about them creates new layers of experience and understanding to take forward into future work. This is vital for us to help people with lived experience to not only tell their stories but to also experience the benefits of creativity for themselves.

Conclusion

Autoethnography is a research methodology that seeks to draw people into the research instead of writing about them (Moriarty, 2019). Ellis and Bochner call this approach to research 'a search for a better conversation in the face of all the barriers and boundaries' (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 748). The method of trioethnography that we have employed here seeks to value conversation as a method of research, offering insights into expertise and experience without reducing these dialogues as merely data and instead placing an emphasis on the voices in this research and their lived experiences. The immobilities of GBV in COVID-19 project identified stories and creative practice as a way of raising awareness, developing empathy and informing policies and practices related to GBV (Moriarty & Parks, 2022). Having used autoethnography as a methodology in the past to bring in and connect colleagues, we thought it would be possible to adapt it to level the playing field in traditional academic research where the academic often researches about the community partner. This approach has implications for issues of power and control within the field of co-production (Bell & Pahl, 2018), which are clearly problematic on a project about GBV where the workshop leads have disclosed a personal motivation for taking part in the project, and instead, this article advocates a way of conducting and disseminating research that we have developed and written together. It is a method of disseminating research that we

identify as collaborative, holistic, feminist, and one that we hope some Lapidus readers might adopt in their own practice.

On the basis of this conversation, we have identified the following as components of effective workshops with people who have experienced GBV. Many of these are examples of best practice in any storytelling workshop setting but we are specifically speaking to work where participants might have experienced, and still be experiencing, GBV.

1. Workshops to offer a range of storytelling activities including text, textile, and other ways of telling and sharing stories that don't privilege only text/written work (inclusive practice).
2. Shared discussion by workshop leaders for the duration of the project to ensure ethical approach that is sensitive to participants' needs, offers opportunities to share best practice, and allows the workshops leaders to share insights and process.
3. The selection of a diverse range of texts as prompts for storytelling that don't alienate.
4. Accessibility—combination of online and face-to-face group workshops and also one-to-one sessions.
5. Clear guidance on accessing online workshops.
6. Professional administrative support that is properly resourced, which ensures participants have clear and accessible information.
7. Safety guidelines at start of each workshop—informed consent.
8. Counselling available for participants and facilitators.
9. Opportunities for joint—participant and researcher—dissemination that is supported and resourced.
10. No tasks that ask participants to directly share insights into their experiences of GBV.

Sarah Helps argues that some stories 'shouldn't and can't be told. In certain settings or because the sharing will actually harm more than help' (2018, p. 60) and the components identified above seek to support participants and limit the potential for anyone—participants or workshop leaders—to be triggered by any of the exercises or stories produced in response. 'To be authentic doesn't necessarily mean telling it all. As if that were even possible.' (Helps, 2018, p. 60). Trioethnography is a potential approach that can value and encourage different ways of telling stories, and in the future, we hope to extend this approach to women taking part in workshops who might like to contribute to dissemination and writing up.

This offers the possibility of the writing process to be part of our individual and collective recovery and part of our challenge and resistance to dominant and dominating male narratives. Metta suggests that telling stories that seek to change dominant discourse: 'places women and their lived experiences of gendered abuse and violence at the centre of self-narrative, plays a critical role in challenging the gendered discourses and structures that underpin the particular social contexts.' (Metta, 2013, p. 134). Working in this way, we hope that this project and our approach can contribute to meaningful societal change around GBV.

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