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Yeo, Emma; Pilson, Anna; Rutter, Nikki; Hasan, Ecem

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We Need to be as a Group: Using and Evaluating the Listening Guide in Feminist Collaborative Autoethnography With an Affective ‘Fifth Listen’ as a Tool to (re)construct Identities

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journals.sagepub.com/home/ijqEmma Yeo¹ , Anna Pilson², Nikki Rutter³ , and Ecem Hasan³

Abstract

As a UK-based group of female postgraduate researchers, the authors explored their experiences during COVID-19 pandemic through multivocal inquiry via a feminist collaborative autoethnographic project. In this paper, we use the Listening Guide as a tool to revisit and (re)analyse data from the aforementioned project, displaying findings in the form of voice poems. In utilising the Listening Guide, we discovered that listening is less of an exercise and more an art form. While the structured approach of the LG helped to enhance our understandings of wider individual experiences of disability and womanhood, identities that all authors inhabit, we were surprised to find that despite our established mutual trust and superficially similar experiences, we were unable to find emotional resonance through data that wasn't our own voice. We also found that the traditional stepped process of the LG that incorporates four listens to the data left our interpretations feeling flat. Through reflexivity and the novel collaborative approach we undertook in this analysis, we identified and implemented an augmentation of the Listening Guide process. In this paper, we propose an additional fifth listen, focusing on emotion, to facilitate a more holistic analysis of voice data. We explore how the fifth listen assisted the (re)construction of individual and collective identities, helping us to reshape our understandings. Finally, we elucidate the positives and pitfalls we experienced in the Listening Guide as a data analysis tool, recommending to other researchers the adoption of an iterative, flexible and reflexive approach in using it during collaborative research.

Keywords

poetry, autoethnography, COVID-19, listening guide, collaboration, voice, emotions, listening, collaborative autoethnography, I poems

Introduction

When conversing with people you know well, interactions are often so habitual and superficial that it brings up the question: are you both listening, or are you each just waiting to talk? The act of *really* listening is less of an exercise and more of an art. A good, active listener recognises the speaker as a social, cultural, and emotional body and relates to them with an ethics of care, grounding themselves in the narrative of the other person (Back, 2007). It is through the *art* of listening, both to one another and also to ourselves, that we also understand *ourselves* as such cultural, social,

and emotional bodies. Yet, as Les Back states: “listening to the world is not an automatic faculty but a skill that needs to be trained” (2007, p. 7). This article constitutes a reflection

¹Department of History, Durham University, Durham, UK

²School of Education, Durham University, Durham, UK

³Department of Sociology, Durham University, Durham, UK

Corresponding Author:

Emma Yeo, Department of History, Durham University, 43 North Bailey, Durham DH1 3EX, UK.

Email: emma.j.yeo@durham.ac.uk



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on the attempts of (and lessons learned by) our established research collective, who felt ourselves well-versed in listening to each other, to engage in the art of listening when utilising the Listening Guide (LG) in our second research project together.

The Listening Guide (LG) “is a qualitative, relational, voice centred, feminist methodology [used] to analyse interview transcripts. [It] places emphasis on the psychological complexities of humans through attention to voice” (Woodcock, 2016, p. 1). Listening closely to both our own and each other’s voices was a key focus in our previous work as a research group whilst conducting a feminist collaborative autoethnography (CAE) project during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through the CAE project, we shared our experiences of UK lockdowns as female postgraduate researchers. This was both an act of solidarity and support, but also as a means of recording the pandemic’s impact on our studies. The cathartic process of group discussion via regular virtual Microsoft Teams meetings, in which we shared our experiences in a sensitive manner, was underpinned by a “relational ethics using a praxis of care” (Rutter et al., 2021, p. 1). This allowed us to reframe an otherwise traumatic pandemic and PhD experience and develop trust through the CAE and the use of friendship as method (Castrodale & Zingaro, 2015).

Due to this extensive and intensive CAE experience, we believed we were attuned to each other’s experiences and had honed the art of dialogic listening effectively. We believed we could faithfully represent each other’s voice and experiences in our writing. The original CAE project resulted in a strong sense of collegiality between us as a group and we wished to continue this research collaboration by revisiting our previous transcripts and recordings in Spring 2021. This seemed a pertinent point to reflect upon our experiences during the first year of the pandemic, having begun to grow and heal from the isolation and disruption COVID-19 engendered.

Collectively reflecting on the transcripts from our first CAE project, we were drawn to discussions around shared experiences of disability, mental health and our own self-identities within a neoliberal society. We were so close to both the data, and one another, that we felt that the boundaries between the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ in each transcript or recording was interchangeable or fluid. As such, we sought an approach that allowed us to analyse data systematically while simultaneously affording us the freedom to explore in a responsive manner. The LG appeared to be the appropriate choice, as it produces poetry through careful selection of individual or shared voice within the data, supporting our relational, voice centred, and feminist approach (Woodcock, 2016). This was particularly the case as so much of our CAE was previously interpreted utilising a reflexive thematic analysis (Rutter et al., 2021), whereas the LG provided an opportunity to focus upon the layering of voice as well as surfacing the social and cultural themes of the data:

By attending to voice and the interplay of voices within an interview transcript or a text, to the dynamics of the research relationship, and to the cultural setting of the research... [The Listening Guide establishes] a contextual framework for understanding or interpretation (Gilligan, 2015, p. 69).

The LG proved to be a powerful and emotive tool for self and mutual exploration. However, it was also problematic or at least, not wholly appropriate for our needs. At times, it provided too directive for the analysis, stymying its ability to surface emotional resonance. Our first engagements with the LG left our interpretations flat. In this article, we explored potential additions to the LG analysis, in the form of a fifth listen, which considered the emotional resonance in what was both said and unsaid. We also critiqued whether the LG is appropriate for use within a CAE and outlined the mistakes we made in its application to our project, reflecting on these ‘pitfalls,’ providing recommendations regarding its use for future researchers.

Methodology

As an analytical tool, the LG offers a structured approach to voice data analysis. It encourages multiple listens/readings of the data with different foci in each listen/read, producing both poetry and nuance between the experience of the speaker and the listener/reader (Gilligan, 2015; Gilligan et al., 2003; Gilligan & Eddy, 2017; Guzzardo et al., 2016; Hutton & Lystor, 2020; Woodcock, 2016).

The LG is typically used alongside interviews to unpack aspects of the data often missed by other forms of analysis, although it has also been used for research involving diary-based methods (Gilligan, 2015; Woodcock, 2016). The CAE that constituted our focal methodological approach combined both dialogic talk data reminiscent of interviews and, due to its constant formal and informal reflection on events and feelings, a simultaneously solicited and unsolicited diarising approach (Rutter et al., 2021; Bartlett & Milligan, 2020, p. 2). Therefore, the LG seemed an appropriate tool to analysis the data generated by our CAE project.

Furthermore, our individual and collective identities became entangled through experience and knowledge throughout the UK lockdowns:

By sharing our histories, values, beliefs and lived experiences we constructed our individual knowledge. Probing our individual differences through collaboration facilitated the co-construction of knowledge which would otherwise have been a raw interpretation of very personal experiences (Rutter et al., 2021, p. 3).

We found that the collective identity created and embedded through our various discussions made us feel less alone. A year into the pandemic, we were curious how time would influence our perceptions of the fluidity and nuance of the ‘we’ and ‘I’

within our data, so we wanted to (re)consider our experiences via a tool that did not wholly individualise our narratives.

We also wanted to utilise an analytical approach which could support our commitment to a feminist epistemological stance in a creative way. A key aspect of the LG involves the creation of poetry by stripping the data down to the personal pronouns used (I, we, and they), and the context in which they were used (Gilligan, 2015). When exploring both nuance and emotional entanglements, poetry can be particularly effective at highlighting the subtler, more nuanced dimensions of experience that are often missed by other forms of analysis (Leavy, 2009; Guzzardo et al., 2016). As a research approach, poetic representation of lived experiences can be particularly illuminative when exploring identity (Guzzardo et al., 2016). As “the autoethnographic ‘I’ itself is not something stable, it is rather constantly changing its position in entwinement with the Other” (Pławski et al., 2019, p. 1003).

We were also influenced by Edwards and Weller (2012), who took an approach derived from the LG to produce ‘I Poems’ created from qualitative longitudinal interview data to explore change and continuity in sense of self over time. We felt that this was a further exemplification of why the LG would be a useful tool to analyse our own CAE sessions to reveal “different facets of the data” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, pp. 13–15) and, therefore, represent more fully our shifting understandings of our identities over time.

Procedure

We met in early 2021 to further explore our co-constructed group identity and our past individual experiences relating to disability, a topic the three disabled members of our original CAE group all felt was important to consider (Rutter et al., 2021; Olsen and Pilson 2022; Yeo, 2023). To catalyse our discussions Emma examined the transcripts from our previous group conversations, the process for which is detailed in our previous article (Rutter et al., 2021) and extracted evidence relating to disability. She created poetry using these previous group conversations. These poems, and prompts resulting from them, were shared on screen at the start of our first data collection session to act as provocations to stimulate new discussions of our “social worlds” (Elizabeth and Grant 2013, p. 130). The data from our previous conversations was then set aside, with our new data forming the basis of this paper.

We held two discussion sessions on Microsoft Teams in the spring of 2021. The first session began by discussing Emma’s creative responses, but we quickly bounced into more emotive and personal territory, far beyond what we had shared the year previously. The transcripts from the two new discussion sessions were then compiled by Nikki.

Emma divided the CAE transcripts into sections, allocating each section to a member of the research team. We each had access to the relevant audio files, requiring high levels of trust within the research group, as others were responsible for representing the ‘I’ of others authentically.

As asserted by the original LG proponents (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan et al., 2003), “the act of listening is not straightforward” (Gilligan & Eddy, 2017, p. 77). Therefore, the LG promotes multiple ‘listens’ to examine the text, whereby each listen had a specific purpose, primarily three successive listens. However, as the LG has been further developed, Woodcock (2016) recommended four listens; with the third listen being completed at least twice to ensure the researcher identifies the tensions that occur within the interaction. Hutton and Lystor (2020) also recommended four listens, but their fourth listen involves “listening for broader political, social and cultural structures” (Hutton & Lystor, 2020, p. 20).

We initially engaged in the four prescribed listens, with the structure largely influenced by Woodcock’s (2016) application, whereby each listen has a unique focus. However, as we will explain, this strategy did not engender a holistic enough understanding. We therefore added a fifth listen to the process. Below is a summary of what each listen entailed:

Listen One: Listening for the Plot. In our first listen, we followed Gilligan et al.’s (2003) guidance to focus on the stories or narratives constructed by the speaker. We attested that these narratives cannot be separated from the “out-of-field voices” that impact upon the embodied voice itself (Mazzei & Jackson, 2012, p. 748). These noiseless but meaningful voices consist of “larger social and cultural contexts [that] are also taken into consideration, as are dominant themes, metaphors, symbols, repeated images, and contradictions” (Cruz, 2021, p. 174).

Our CAE data contained many out-of-field voices. Our monologues, dialogues and responses to prompts were usually related to macro-level developments in our lives. As we were working with transcripts and recordings of the CAE conversations rather than responses to interview questions, we found that we could immediately track the social location and recall our emotional responses to the narratives. We ourselves were part of the stories and so our initial reader-response had to navigate the challenges of being an actor, narrator, and interpreter at once.

Listen Two: Searching for “I” and Creating Poems. In the second listen we sought the first-person voice through the ‘I’. We listened to our respective audio files and highlighted relevant sections of the transcripts, contextualising the ‘I’s we found. We then used the highlighted sections to construct poems from the ‘I’ statements, in an iterative and intertwined process of engagement and interpretation. Listening to the tone and emphases within the text, we balanced what was said with how it was said. Even when listening to our own words, we recognised we were making decisions through a subjective lens as analysts, divorced from the original context by the fog of time. The initial construction of the poems allowed us to ‘zoom in’ on the voices, stripping back layers of ‘out of field voices’ to find the essence of the data.

Our first two listens in the LG process took place individually. We each produced poetry based upon our assigned sections of the transcripts and selected the most meaningful and rich examples for further analysis. At this stage in May 2021, we met for a synchronous analysis session. Our poems were compiled into a shared document and Emma re-allocated us different sections of the transcripts and poetry to analyse, in an aim to create joint ownership of the process while managing the logistical challenges involved in remote collaboration.

Listen Three: Focusing on Contrapuntal Voices. Here we focused on how relationships were interpreted by others in the group and examined contrapuntal voices (Gilligan et al., 2003; Gilligan, 2015; Woodcock, 2016). We identified where ‘we’ sat within the voice and saw the tensions existing between authors/speakers and broader structural challenges such as conflicts with organisations, institutions, and family. We even recognised previously hidden moments of conflict within our own in-group interactions. This listen highlighted how we interpreted much of the voice data as negative: oppression, control, powerlessness, anger, and apology. On reflection, we felt that these themes were indicative of our overarching pandemic experience, but they did not allow for the surfacing of the occasional “fucking magical” encounters we had enjoyed (Rutter et al., 2021, p. 8).

Listen Four: Interpretation?. The fourth listen in more “traditional” applications of the LG consists of the development of:

An interpretation of the text... that pulls together and synthesises the evidence or what has been learned through this entire process of listening and on this basis, the researcher composes an analysis (Lugo & Gilligan, 2021, p. 203).

When we reconvened to discuss our poems and findings, we recognised that we were framing voices negatively when listening to our own voice but were positive when analysing the voice of other members of the team. This dichotomy may make this listen may be particularly challenging for those using the LG in relation to CAE work and we required a significant amount of discussion, reflection, and reflexivity to resolve this.

For the fourth listen we used opposing frameworks to promote depth of inquiry. For example: when we found oppression, where was resistance? If there was control, where was liberation? This helped to reframe the listen and supported us to return to the data with curiosity (Gilligan & Eddy, 2021). However, rather than a tool for summary, the fourth listen felt like an extension of the third listen, a means of “quelling the cacophony” (Tolman & Head, 2021, p. 158) of contrapuntal voices, without thematising too linearly in a way that would undermine our analysis and flatten our narratives. We felt unable to undertake the final step of composing an analysis, as the emotionality of constructing

the poems was uncaptured. Thus, we engaged in a fifth listen.

Listen Five: The Fifth Listen. Emotion has been a key driver in helping us to develop our understanding of our/selves and our collective experiences (Rutter et al., 2021). Furthermore, the emotional resonance of poetry as a method undoubtedly reiterated the centrality of emotion in this process.

During her doctoral studies, which ran concurrent with this research project, Anna used the LG. She found that her application of the LG as a process of four listens was not sufficient to elucidate all the rhizomatic voices that were present and inter- and intra-acting in her work, forming “heterogeneous, connecting, rupturing storylines that were at times coherent but more often, contradictory” (O’Grady, 2018, p. 262).

Similarly, as we followed Woodcock’s four listens (2016) we understood ourselves and each other as social and cultural bodies, but not as emotional ones. Returning to Back (2007), we were not truly able to ground ourselves into our mutual narratives. In order to access the affective dimension of the data, we created a ‘Fifth Listen’ that focused on the emotional resonance in what was both said and unsaid.

The Benefit of the Fifth Listen. Feminist scholar Sara Ahmed (2004) asserts that:

Emotions are not simply something ‘I’ or ‘we’ have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others. (p. 10)

In its centring of relationality, the LG is an inherently affective methodology. Our research suggested that the LG in its standard iteration of four listens risks forgetting to pay “attention to the *feel* of the interview” (Cruz, 2021, p. 173, emphasis added) or talk data; missing the multi-layered emotional meanings that the LG has the potential to surface.

The fifth listen required engagement in two parts: individually and collectively. Firstly, the main focus of the fifth listen was to understand the affective influence of the data. To undertake this listen, we individually re-listened to the audio and re-read the transcripts to listen once again as in listen two for intonation, emphasis, and pauses. Here the only focus was on *how* things were said, the emotion underpinning those words, and the emotion underpinning the interpretation of the listener.

This helped to highlight the subtle and perhaps hidden ways that identity could be co-constructed by the collaborators, such as the non-linguistic cues we found within the talk data that had previously eluded us. We showed our embodied discomfort and pain even when using words suggesting confidence. Our attempts to be stoic about potentially emotive topics were betrayed by our physical reactions, such as coughing when disclosing mental health conditions. When

discussing our experiences of dis/ableism (Anna), we sighed, we paused, we spoke rapidly, as if that may take away the pain of discussing our challenges. The fifth listen, therefore, was necessary to reconcile the emotional aspect of the listening, and the impact of the listening exercises on our interpretations of our lived experiences.

This fifth listen also allowed us to interrogate the contrapuntal voices identified in the third listen more reflexively. We reconciled the voices of the past with our present, more empowered, voices. However, the individual component of the fifth listen component was not so resonant for those who were not listening to their *own* voice. Nikki created voice poems from data of other group members, but the organisation of data analysis tasks unwittingly forfeited the opportunity for her to do so with her own words. Therefore, she did not experience the emotional resonance of listening to her own story and creating from it. This disconnect will be explored further in the *Reflections* section below.

The second part of the fifth listen comprised of analysing the poems collectively and returning to working on the data together as a collective ‘we’. We did this by presenting the poems we had created through sharing our computer screens and talking through our findings together. Building on our feedback from the individual fifth listen, we ensured that we identified who was the original speaker, and who was the listener (i.e., poet). Like Ahmed (2004), we understood through our first CAE project that emotion can be “contagious”, but we also came to appreciate that “even when we feel we have the same feeling, we don’t necessarily have the same relationship to the feeling” (p. 10). Hence, this collective analysis stage was crucial to both checking understandings and ensuring an ethics of care in avoiding accidental misrepresentation of each other’s words and feelings.

Findings

Our findings are presented in the format of ‘I Poems’ (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Koelsch, 2015), and the collective analysis we undertook of them. We felt that ‘I Poems’ is a misnomer, and so described them as ‘voice poems’. Not only did the poems often utilise other personal pronouns interchangeably with ‘I’ (e.g. ‘we’, ‘they’, ‘she’), but also the poems represented simultaneously our own embodied voices and the out-of-field voices, therefore going beyond “the narrative ‘I’” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008, p. 299). In this section, we shared the collective analysis from the fifth listen, so you will read “we said”, “we did”, rather than an individualisation of the data in a ‘who-said-what’ format. This is a deliberate method of framing, demonstrating how our initial individual reflections grew to be understood collectively. However, it is also representative of the fact that we found ourselves referring to ourselves as “we” automatically as the research journey progressed.

The poems are presented in three columns. The left-hand column included statements using ‘I’ (first person), second person in the middle column and the right-hand side column

included third person ‘they/she’ statements. The poems are written relevant to the cadence in which they were spoken.

Becoming ‘We’. The first poem represented an emblematic theme, becoming ‘we’ as a research collective. Through this mutual support and understanding, we found ourselves able to engage more fully with our positions as disabled female researchers. We created and examined our voice poems explicitly through the lens of marginalisation, in addition to the insidious slow violence perpetrated by many institutions at the heart of society.

Our transformation to becoming a research-activist collective in the academic space can be seen in the following ‘we’ voice poem, chosen as it demonstrates how we transformed from the isolated and exposed vulnerable ‘I’ to the empowered ‘we’, has a sense of belonging and a desire to engage in change:

we actually refer to ourselves as ‘we’
 we’re distancing our **selves**
 we’re actually a collective group
 we’re actually ‘we’
 we’re all individuals
 but we’re a collective
 collective ‘we-ness’
 we did a lot of ranting
 we are very much a team
 we were a bit scared
 the transformative process we’ve gone through
 we were talking
 we internalise
 we’ve got to write something about disability
 we’ve got to engage in change
 we need to **be** as a group

The emphasis on the final ‘be’ emerged as we recognised an element of *becoming*. The CAE process was transformational, we were not individuals but a group in our own right who had worked to “re-understand individual experiences through a collective lens” (Torre et al., 2012, p. 174). This process of (re)empowerment through ‘we’ echoed the findings of Stephens (2019) whereby creating a secure space within the academic sphere built our confidence, enforced healthy boundaries, and recognised what is comfortable and what is acceptable to us as individuals, and as a group. However, here we also found ourselves within the centre of the tensions faced by all feminist researchers: “We want to live our contradictions, to become-academic through uprooting what it means to be academic” (Brooks et al., 2020, p. 292).

These movements, transformations, and tensions would otherwise have been lost if we had not captured them through this process. By engaging in actively feminist research and analytical processes we reconstructed our identities through the process of collaborating and celebrating our ‘I’, whilst reimagining the endless possibilities of who we could henceforth ‘become’. By tracking, observing, and listening to the process we have engaged in, we reconciled some of the

more difficult challenges facing us as disabled, women academics, because we realised that we can face anything together.

“They Don’t Have a Name”: Empowerment Versus Powerlessness and the Disabled Experience. As we reflected critically on our position as disabled women, facing ableist institutions and systems on a daily basis, Emma, recalled an event whereby she expected a professional to assist her in accessing disability-related resources. Instead, this professional became an embodiment of the oppressive institution they represented. In this experience, the individual appeared to lack understanding or care and instead Emma felt her representations of herself manipulated in a highly damaging way. We mediated the ethical and emotional challenges surrounding this experience by stripping the so-called professional of their name.

They don’t have a name
That woman

You’re so right
They don’t have an identity

Like an oppressive force
the lack of name gives them more power

In my head
They represent an oppressive establishment
They don’t need to be named
They’re not a person

Or because I don’t give them a name
They take on the identity
Positive people got names
Horrible people got to be ‘that woman’
‘That man’

I don’t know why
I don’t know what
That person is ‘that woman’
not [name redacted]
‘that woman’
All she’ll ever be
‘That woman’

who did that to me
But she has an identity
The same as the woman on the helpline
A tiny part of her day

But I’ll carry that with me forever.

In the face of powerlessness stemming from decisions made by a government employee, we attempted to reclaim power over these experiences by stripping out individual details. “That woman” was a disembodied cog within the wider government system, lacking the personhood their denial of Emma’s disability took from her. Institutions hold power over our bodies as disabled people, from access to medical care to our ability to obtain assistance needed for our success in academia and wider employment opportunities (Dolmage, 2017; Olsen et al., 2020). Selective remembrance became both an empowering act of resistance, granting control over our own memories of this traumatic experience, and served to

compound our negative assumptions regarding these institutions.

The left-hand side of the voice poem shows an internal monologue, we agree with the interpretation of the experience and then show vulnerability: *“I don’t know.”* Within this poem there are two voices: the voice of the empowered woman reshaping the traumas of her past in the only way she knows how (through attempting to deny its power) and of the frightened service user at the mercy of an institution she is unable to understand. It was in our fifth listen that we re-evaluated this vulnerability. By denying a name to the individual concerned in perpetrating dis/ableism, we, as a group, dismantled the power of their actions and reiterated our collective strength. By contrast, reading the poem individually risked compounding our fear of these institutions.

We also found that we gave names to those professionals who provided us with a positive experience. They appeared to be the exception, reinforcing the legacy of discrimination. Our final listen to the audio relating to this voice poem gave us access to a previously hidden aspect of the identity-shaping nature of this experience. Each use of “but” marked not an interjection within the narrative, but an attempt to impress a message upon the listener; a sense of physical as well as emotional burden: *“But I’ll carry that forever.”*

“I Think It’s a Woman Thing - you Know, You’re Apologising for Yourself” Sorry Seems to be the Easiest Word. Within the data, we all frequently apologised for actions or words requiring no apology. Our repeated listens to the transcripts betrayed the expectations of women in society that we had not realised that we, as committed feminists, had absorbed and perpetuated. We used this observation to question whether we were apologising because we have been conditioned to do so. The poems we have categorised under this theme suggest that ‘sorry’ is a word employed much more frequently by women than men. In its most powerful iteration it can, at best, deflect patriarchal narratives. At worst, it can accept them:

I think it is a woman thing -
you know, you’re apologising for yourself,
you’re apologising ‘cause you’re late,
you’re apologising ‘cause you’re rambling,
you’re apologising ‘cause you’re quiet,
you’re apologising ‘cause you’re tired,
you’re apologising ‘cause your kid’s a pain the arse,
you’re always apologising – it’s that guilt...

The repetition of the phrase *‘you’re apologising’* followed by a listing of often quite innocuous reasons for apology shows how close-to-the-surface the desire to apologise was for us. It must be noted that the use of ‘you’ in this poem is done so by the speaker as interchangeable with ‘I’. Many people who speak British English as a first language employ this generic ‘you’, also known as ‘impersonal you’, when using casual English to represent the self or the unknown subject. The ambiguous use of the generic

‘you’ here, demonstrated a tacit acceptance of the universality of the phenomenon for women.

In the individual phase of the fifth listen, this poem was felt to demonstrate the trauma of womanhood. However, during the collective facet of the fifth listen, this extract was described as a ‘rant’ by the original speaker, potentially undermining its power. This may have represented a self-deprecating attempt by the speaker to separate herself from her words, knowing that to complain could be considered buying into the trope of the ‘difficult woman’. It is also telling that the poem ended with the word ‘guilt’, because this retraction of power by defining it as a ‘rant’ could be representative of the guilt women are conditioned to feel within society for trying to critique the patriarchy.

While women, and especially those who occupy more than one category of oppression, appear to be constantly apologising, conversely men (particularly cisgender, heterosexual, non-disabled, white men) appeared to move through life without presenting the concerns:

“you would never have a man come in with the PowerPoint they’ve made and apologize for talking:

“I’m sorry,
I’m talking too much”.

Even when engaging in a critique of the patriarchy, the spectre of sorry is never far from the female vocabulary. Furthermore, we also found apology littering our reflections on disability. This led us to question whether beyond the tendency to say sorry, were we apologising so frequently because our disabled identities have ‘othered’ us. It was clear that we have (unwittingly) internalised narratives that we are ‘less than’, ‘wrong’, ‘burdensome’ on account of straddling these marginalised intersecting identities. Therefore, while we were not able to fully reconcile our ingrained beliefs, the creation, and analysis of the voice poems allowed us to begin the long process of re-evaluating our intersecting identities.

Reflections: Lessons Learned, and Recommendations

Our collective experience of using the LG allowed us to re-evaluate our experiences as disabled women during the pandemic. From this perspective, it was a valuable, challenging and emotive process. As we engaged with data based on both our own and other group members’ experiences, we continuously transcended the boundaries between ‘insider/outsider’ and ‘researcher’/‘researched’ (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Yost and Chmielewski, 2013).

In centring relationships, the LG:

Reframes the research process as a process of relationship, guiding both data collection and data analysis. Seen in this light, authentic relationship and responsive listening become integral to the process of discovery. (Gilligan & Eddy, 2017, p. 80, p. 80)

While using the LG was empowering, it was also at times exigent. We encountered numerous pitfalls during our utilisation of the LG in a CAE project and our reflection upon these provides suggestions for future researchers to be mindful of, while we also found a positive outcome of our application of the tool. The development of our fifth listen is, we believe, a crucial extension of the LG process.

Reflexivity - Getting on the Same Page When You’re not Even in the Same Room. In their article on narrative inquiry using the LG, Doucet and Mauthner (2008) asserted the need for: “Constant reflexive writing on the part of the researcher to chart and document how relations between researchers and their subjects are always in ontological flux and subject to endless interpretation.” (p. 404)

This approach is also relevant to CAE. Collaborative autoethnographers attempt to understand our own identities and personal narratives in a relational way. Underlying our research was the unspoken supposition that we were *on the same page*. As we had built in opportunities to share our individual analyses, we believed that we all had a similar understanding of the essence of the project and how the LG had helped us to frame and analyse the data. However, it wasn’t until Emma asked for formal written reflections on the process that we realised the experience had in actuality been quite different for each of us. This (mis)understanding was initially missed because of the virtual and often asynchronous manner in which we undertook the project.

The pandemic restrictions in the UK meant that we have been unable to physically be in the same room and so our research processes were (co)constructed remotely. Like the COVID GAP (Gendered Academic Productivity) research collective of female academics, we found that collaborating during lockdown allowed us to offer each other friendship and support, while the auto-transcription of transcripts made revisiting the data less arduous (Brown et al., 2022a, 2022b). Being virtual allowed us to be flexible with meeting times to suit the physical, emotional, and practical needs of the team, thereby adhering to the concept of ‘crip time’ (Kafer and Queer, 2013; McRuer, 2018). Despite these benefits, we would advise researchers to think carefully about conducting this work online. The lack of immediacy in our engagement with the data sometimes stymied our ability to identify issues, as described above. It also occasionally undermined the identity of the group. Members were able to undertake their portion of the research on their own timeframes and make their own interpretation of the task, sometimes leading to uneven depth of analysis. Therefore, the fifth listen was critical in allowing us to check our analyses with the originator of the dialogue that formed the voice poems. However, we did not leave adequate space to reflect on the process in an ongoing manner. We recommend future researchers using the LG in an autoethnographic and/or collaborative way must build in

structured formal junctures for reflective and reflexive discussions throughout the process. In using LG as we have, member-checking is essential.

Analysis and Ownership – Whose Words? Whose Voice? Whilst we discovered that undertaking analysis using the LG proved extremely emotive and cathartic for Emma and Anna, it transpired that Nikki did not experience such an affective dimension. For example, Anna fed back in her written reflections at the end of the analysis period: ‘[The LG] provides an emotional resonance to data and is as affective as it is arguably effective in framing stories within academic research’. This reference to the emotive power of the process was echoed by Emma:

I never expected it to be such a thought provoking and idea generating experience as it was - from the initial test poems I made back in February, we had such an emotional...discussion, which was then the basis for this article. I definitely learned a lot about my own understandings of my identity as a disabled woman and found it a cathartic experience in its own right.

However, Nikki stated: ‘[I thought using the LG would be] empowering, supportive, and that we were all on the same page creating the same thing (I was so wrong...)’.

During an additional collaborative session undertaken to unpack the project’s outcomes, we uncovered this jarring disjoint between the experiences of the collaborators. It transpired that Emma and Anna had analysed poems pertaining to their own personal experiences and as such, straddled a combined position of “researcher” and “researched” whereas Nikki had not analysed any poems containing excerpts of her own dialogue. This occurred unwittingly because of our selection and organisational methods. Nikki did not feel the emotive connection with the data in the same way as Emma and Anna because she was not reflecting on her own experiences and so felt more detached from the words she was analysing. To assuage this, we recommend that if other researchers are using the LG during a collaborative research process, the author/participant whose words form the content of a voice poem is given the opportunity to analyse the poem individually, before undertaking collective analysis in the fifth listen.

A Positive Outcome: Identifying the Power of the Fifth Listen. Carol Gilligan has continued to refine the LG, by further elucidating its stepped methodology (Gilligan & Eddy, 2021), joined by other academics who continue to adapt the LG. For instance, Kiegelmann (2021) included an additional listen for further social context, and Tolman and Head (2021) added in another stage of voice analysis before composing a final interpretation of the data. Our utilisation of the LG, as described in this article, produced a unique contribution to feminist qualitative data analysis in that it expands the stages of the LG by adding a fifth listen which centres emotion.

This addition recognises the affective impact of feminist CAE as a research methodology that allows emotions to surface both in and across individuals and collectives (Ahmed, 2004). The LG provided us with a structured means of undertaking deep analysis and revisiting our talk data, “retelling, remembering, and reconfiguring” (Benhabib, 1999, p. 348) our experiences. However, we found that it wasn’t until an additional fifth listen that we were able to understand ‘the temporal and relational aspects of narratives as well as to the subject’s own understanding of how she/he fits into a given narrative’ (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008, p. 406) and with this, begin to re-imagine our identities.

During the pandemic, we established that the essence of our collective experience as PhD students was largely negative (Rutter et al., 2021). Therefore, listening back to the data could constitute a profoundly emotional experience. This was heightened by the subsequent creation of voice poems, as Anna noted:

The emotions I felt when reading - coming in waves, sometimes soothing, but largely pounding, relentless - were almost overpowering. Mentally. Physically. The lump in my throat. The flushing of my face. The tightness of my chest. The twitching of my legs. The hesitation, the repetition, the pauses. The pain.

Even at this latter stage in the research process, it was necessary for its creator to take a deep breath before re-reading the poem, as its underpinning sense of masking vulnerability remains all-too resonant as we continue to try to navigate our lives and studies in the time of COVID-19.

Woodcock (2016) recommends manually colour-coding data in order to fully engage with its diegetic impact. We agree with Woodcock’s advice. However, we also attest that ascertaining more holistic interpretations from the data was only possible through *listening* back to the data. We recommend that other researchers employing the LG listen back to pick up on the nuances of expression: non-verbal clues, the manner of speech and what a speaker chooses to leave unspoken. Re-engaging with the aural data as well as the written codes throughout the process is crucial for engaging in listening for plot, constructing voice poems and identifying contrapuntal voices. We also recommend that a fifth listen is undertaken at the end of the process to reconcile the different voices and silences interwoven throughout the narratives via ‘deep listening’.

Conclusions

Gilligan and Eddy (2021) assert that relationships become “the path to knowing. Rather than being in the way, relationship is the way of coming to know the other, whether another person or previously hidden aspects of oneself” (p. 144). At the heart of building relationships is building mutual understandings. To do this, we must engage in active listening. Having used the LG as a tool to undertake this

process, we have come to understand listening through Back's seminal lens – as something “difficult and disruptive...[which] challenges the listener's preconceptions and position while...[engaging] critically with the content of what is being said and heard” (2007, p. 23). In navigating this journey, this experience has demonstrated how we utilised the LG to reimagine our difficult experiences. We (re)understood our personal intersecting identities via group ‘epiphanies’ (Denzin, 1989). These findings gave significant insight into the experiences of women, especially disabled women, during the pandemic. We critically analysed our experiences of using the LG for a reflective CAE project and suggested that the successful use of the LG requires an additional fifth listen, allowing for a more effective and holistic analysis and reflection upon the data. Finally, we critiqued the LG as a data analysis tool, outlining the positives and pitfalls that we experienced in using the method so that other researchers may have the confidence to utilise and customise it to their needs effectively.

By using the LG in the highly reflexive manner, we have developed more nuanced understandings of challenging moments in our personal lives but also broadened our understanding of what it means to be a collective. We have all experienced discrimination and marginalisation, but by listening affectively in a way that avoids “symbolic...violence” (Puwar, 2004, p. 49) we could move forward and reclaim our own traumas, thus working to deny their continued power over us. Through employing an “ethics of emotional care and support” (Malacrida, 2007, p. 1330) when considering sensitive past experiences and by utilising feminist methods we not only greatly improved our understanding of our experiences of the pandemic, but also of our selves.

The complexities of our group identity were brought to the surface as we found that our collective identity could not transcend the individual constructions of the task. We navigated the process through mutual kindness and an ethics of care but our individual constructions created tensions when we attempted to conduct tasks apart. It was only through joint discussion that we could fully appreciate the differences in understandings of our project and outcomes. Nikki described this effectively, that we can perceive ourselves to be as a group, but this is in actuality a state of *becoming* a group. Becoming a group is a liminal rather than linear process. Friendship can always be more static and stable. Assuming that our use of the LG was underpinned by the static nature of our friendship, rather than recognising the liminality of ‘we-ness’ that the group provided, is where many of our challenges regarding the LG lay.

Overall, we envisaged that the LG would provide a creative and emotive means of (re)understanding our experiences. Indeed, at times, it provided powerful outcomes. The poems we created centred individual experiences. Both producing these poems and our initial analyses of these creative responses to our lived experiences were processes steeped in emotional resonance. This proved cathartic for some of the authors. The poems allowed us not only to process the impact

of the pandemic on our lives, but also to re-imagine challenging aspects of our wider identities.

Despite our cautionary advice, we felt that utilising the LG in a highly reflexive way with our advised fifth listen makes, was a powerful analytical tool. Researchers ascribing to a feminist epistemology; those concerned with voice; those who wish to promote social justice; and/or those interested in representing autoethnographic accounts may find it particularly of use. The LG provided us with a structured approach to data analysis, with enough freedom to use the tool responsively. With the fifth listen, it produced an emotional resonance to our data and is as affective as it is arguably effective in (re)framing stories within academic research, and in reflecting on lived experience.

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ORCID iDs

Emma Yeo  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3243-2177>

Nikki Rutter  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7671-506X>

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