



**‘PLEASE EXPLAIN TO ME HOW I’M VULNERABLE’: LEARNING
HOW TO REWORK EXPERIENCES OF RESEARCHER
VULNERABILITY BY LISTENING CAREFULLY TO CARE
EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE**

The Eighth Annual Qualitative Research
Symposium

Researcher Vulnerability

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OVERVIEW

The study

A case of vulnerability?

Rejecting the positioning of vulnerable

Structural inequalities and stigma

Recognising vulnerability – emotion and the researcher

Building resilience – translating emotion to action

Making research count

Recognising barriers as structural

THE STUDY

Social care practitioners – survey (n=23)

Young people leaving care – interviews and creative methods (n=21)

Opportunities to share experiences of the pandemic

Voices from Care Cymru

Roberts et al (2020, 2021)



JULIE — EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE PANDEMIC

Going without adequate essential resources

Heating, phone credit to access resources

Reluctant to get help with mental health issues

Unsupported

'I might as well have no fucking support off them... d'you know what I mean? The most support I need is money, that's what I need, people say 'what's money, you don't need money', that's the only support I need, for someone to help me. Then they start telling me that I can't cope... So, I'm thinking well the one minute you're saying you can't help me and the next minute you're saying I can't cope with anything'.

REJECTING THE POSITIONING OF VULNERABLE

'I'm vulnerable, I'm a vulnerable person because I'm a kid in care. So, what you saying all kids in care are vulnerable. If I'm vulnerable right I wouldn't be in the situation that I'm in, and if I'm vulnerable I wouldn't have a clue what I'm doing. If I was vulnerable, I'd be going out doing whatever with whoever and seeing whoever. I am doing that, no, I'm sat at in the van, I'm in a relationship, I been with him two and a half year. D'you know what I mean, I'm settled down with a child, sorted my life out. But no, I'm vulnerable'.

STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES, INFANTILIZATION AND STIGMA

Motherhood can be positioned as a source of pride and respect, marking an important transition to adulthood (Gillies 2007)

Pride and respect can become contaminated by discourses of stigma often attached to young parents (Brady and Brown 2013; Mannay et al 2018), parents living in poverty (Tyler, 2008), and care experienced parents (Roberts 2021; Morriss 2018)

Julie's account raises questions about the extent to which markers of adulthood, such as parenthood, become overridden by conceptualisations of the care child and its associated stigmas

And the ways in which the Coronavirus pandemic accentuated ideas of vulnerability that further undermine the status of adulthood for care leavers who are parents

REPOSITIONING JULIE

Not vulnerable but resilient

Adult, mother, impacted by structural barriers

Unable to contact services with no phone credit

Unable to report health issue because of fears of being seen as more 'vulnerable'

Surveillance rather than support

Coronavirus pandemic used as a lever to confer vulnerability

Pandemic made already difficult transitions to adulthood, 'a massive struggle' and 'a constant battle'

RECOGNISING VULNERABILITY — EMOTION AND THE RESEARCHER

Academic claims to objectivity and neutrality

Emotion is not an intrusion into the research process, but a constitutive element of it.
So why do we so often pretend it is not there? (Loughran and Mannay 2018)

Shock, sadness, sympathy, empathy, familiarity, transient insider/outsider,
responsibility, frustration, anger, hopelessness, powerless, inertia

Recognising vulnerabilities



BUILDING RESILIENCE – TRANSLATING EMOTION TO ACTION - MAKING RESEARCH COUNT

Mobilising feelings of vulnerability

Research accrues the most benefit for the researcher

Benefit sharing - participants and other stakeholders should benefit from research equally with researchers (Kara et al 2020)

Moving 'beyond the academic article' (Mannay 2019, p. 659)

Finding ways to inform policy and practice



RECOGNISING BARRIERS AS STRUCTURAL

But ‘vulnerability’ can be read in participants, researchers and wider structures

To date, all CASCADE staff involved with the group have been women. This is perhaps unsurprising given that CASCADE’s team is female dominated. Displaying and managing patience, compassion, warmth and calmness are all part of facilitating CASCADE Voices. This emotion-work has been argued to be expected of and practiced by women to a greater extent than men in academic research but not valued in the same way as other aspects of research (Reay 2004). The gendered division and misrecognition of emotional labour is not the domain of this chapter, but it is noted because we are seeking to provide a reflexive account of the group and its functioning (footnote Staples et al 2018).



SUMMARY

How do we frame vulnerability?

Are interpretations of vulnerability in individuals and communities a reflection of people and collectives or responses to wider structural inequalities and stigmas that try to infantilize and locate vulnerability within the person?

It is important for researchers to recognise emotion and vulnerability but can this fragility be drawn on as a motivation to engender change?

Are their vulnerabilities in the structure of academia that make benefit sharing and shared work more difficult? Is this an issue of vulnerability or an issue of the structure itself?

Thank you
for
listening!



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