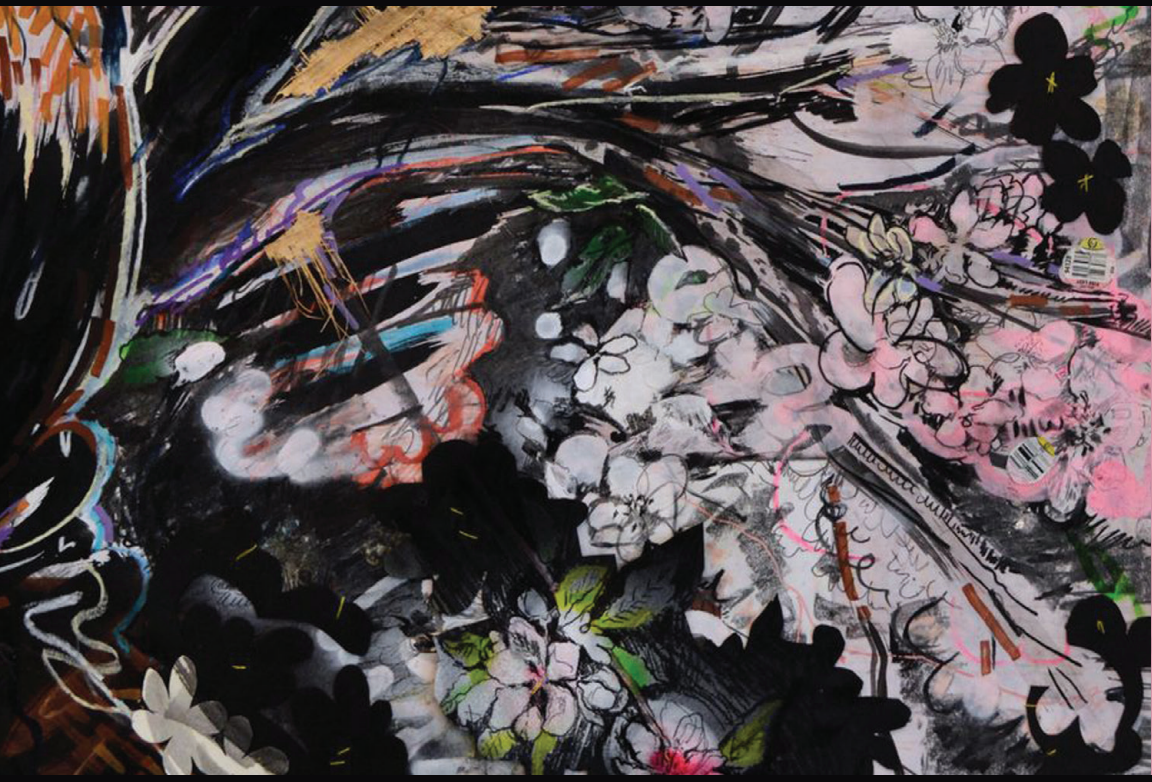
Research is the Poetry

Poetic Inquiry for Writing Studies Researchers



Practices & Possibilities

Sandra L. Tarabochia

RESEARCH IS THE POETRY: POETIC INQUIRY FOR WRITING STUDIES RESEARCHERS

Practices & Possibilities

Series Editors: Aimee McClure, Aleashia Walton, Jagadish Paudel, and Mike Palmquist

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Dedication

For Craig, Gabe, and Shamus

Acknowledgments

This book would not have been possible without the faculty writers who participated in my longitudinal study. Thank you for sharing your minds, hearts, and lives over the years. You inspire me.

A heartfelt thanks to everyone at the WAC Clearinghouse for all you did to make the publication process a smooth and joyful one. Special thanks to my insightful, gracious reviewers who pushed me to think in new and important ways. The book is better because of you.

I am delighted to have the work of artist Isa Rodriguez grace the cover of this book. Their piece *Apple Blossoms 02, 2018* (mixed media on paper) beautifully captures the color, contrast, and movement I associate with poetic practice. Rodriguez's art and philosophy embody the spirit of poetic inquiry. An Artist in Residence at the Oklahoma Contemporary Arts Center, designer of the Radical Drawing Project, and co-creator of the community-based arts education project Practice Practice examining artistic practice in everyday life, Rodriguez lives their belief that creativity can be a tool for liberation and meaningful social transformation.

I am grateful for support from the University of Oklahoma, including my colleagues in the English department who have championed my work in countless ways. My research was supported (in part) by a grant from the Research Council of the University of Oklahoma Norman Campus. Financial support was also provided from the Dodge Family College of Arts and Sciences, Office of the Vice President for Research and Partnerships, and University Libraries at the University of Oklahoma.

Many thanks to my generous mentors, friends, and colleagues who encouraged and supported me in taking the leap to experiment with arts-based methods. My writing group Lesley Bartlett and Jessica Rivera-Mueller have read and responded to every iteration of every chapter of this book from acorn to oak. Kristy Brugar indulged my messy thinking-in-progress on many a long morning run. Collie Fulford taught me so much about what it means to live poetic inquiry. Andrea Olinger has been steady partner in critical, creative thought. Michele Eodice has been a patient mentor, sounding board, and writing retreat facilitator many times over.

Thank you Craig and Gabe for stoking my creativity and courage.

So many people have touched me and this project over the last decade. I appreciate and hold close your numerous gifts.

RESEARCH IS THE POETRY: POETIC INQUIRY FOR WRITING STUDIES RESEARCHERS

Introduction. Poetic Inquiry and Writing Studies Research

Writing, Like a Road Trip

Writing's like a road trip,
This factory process of keeping things moving …
trying to get to the next stop.
He said up the body count,
It's more assembly line thinking,
so I'm upping the body count.
trying to get to the next stop.
Now I want to sit a while before going to the next place.
Those months that I didn't do much.
Hurry, think of a project!
Where I was just sad.
I don't see the end of it.
Good ideas don't come out of busy days.

"Writing, Like a Road Trip" is a poem I crafted using phrases mined from interviews I conducted with faculty writers in which we talked about what it's like to write for high stakes scholarly publication, what it's like to build and sustain an academic writing life. I am struck by how the poem captures the resilience of these writers, their persistence, their willingness to do what must be done to get to the next stop, even when there is no end in sight. The poem surfaces embodied, emotional dimensions of writers' lived experience and highlights the complex relationship between unique and shared experiences among faculty. It offers an artful way of considering how academic institutions, systems, structures, values, and expectations impact the lives of real people and the implications of those impacts for access, equity, and epistemic justice in higher education. This book is about how and why I came to write poems like these and the potential value of the methodology I employed, poetic inquiry, for writing studies researchers.

For nearly a decade, I conducted interviews with faculty writers from several universities, across institutional positions and various disciplinary fields about writing for publication, pursuing tenure and promotion, negotiating personal and professional relationships, establishing writing practices and identities, navigating institutional systems and structures, and related topics. Over the years, I published several articles based on these interviews, including collaborations with fellow researchers about the emotional landscapes and transformative

experiences of advanced academic writers. I have been profoundly moved, surprised, delighted, devastated, infuriated, and inspired by what I heard, especially as I groped my own way forward transitioning into life after tenure, searching for purpose in my academic career and passion in my writing life. At some point, though, I realized I couldn't shake the nagging feeling that I wasn't moving with integrity: the ways I was holding, analyzing, and circulating writers' stories (and, I am coming to see, my own story as well) were not aligned with my values, with what writers were telling me needed to change about academic institutions, discourse and culture, with my commitments as a writing researcher to honoring the full complexity of writing, writers, and writing lives. I realized I was moved, touched, and transformed in ways I wasn't capturing in my published work.

Driven by this feeling, I searched and searched for a qualitative research framework that would allow me to capture the complexity of what I was discovering through my research with faculty writers; eventually, I discovered poetic inquiry, an arts-based research method that involves crafting poetry from qualitative research endeavors to analyze data and/or represent findings. I was immediately captivated by reading research poetry. As I read, I felt powerful embodied and emotional connections that reminded me of interacting with writers in my own research. I began to experiment with writing found poems crafted with lines from transcripts of interviews with my study participants. I might have stopped there, content to revel in this experience of composing poems from my data as a way of connecting with fellow writers, sitting with their words, internalizing their meaning in the context of my own life. I did not consider myself a poet or even an artistic person and assumed I was unqualified to officially apply poetic inquiry as a research methodology. Two simultaneous experiences changed my thinking, transformed my relationship to writing and research, and led to the book you are reading now.

First, as part of my recovery from the tenure track and transition to life after tenure, I participated in a two-year collaborative life coaching experiment initiated by a coach a friend of mind had been working with. I joined my friend, a faculty member secretly working on a novel, and two other successful women embarking on transitions toward new projects and stages of life. We met with a life coach three times a month, twice as a group and once in individual sessions. One component of our work together became redefining our relationships with creativity. I composed the following poem during a collaborative coaching retreat in fall 2021.

Swing
suspended, supported
floating, flying, lingering, listening
wonderous, weightless
Imagine

The process of (re)discovering creativity manifested differently for each of us—my friend leaned into her novel, another woman, a creative writing teacher at an arts academy boldly developed inquiry-centered curriculum, and the third member, recently retired, imagined ways to cultivate a sustainable community in rural Arkansas. Growing my practice of poetic inquiry as the heart of my post-tenure book project became the vehicle for my journey with creativity. The support of the coach and that collective empowered me to revisit initial skepticism about poetic inquiry—Could I be a poet? Was I a poet already? What could blending writing, research, and poetry unlock in/for me? The following found poem, which I composed from a zine created by a member of our coaching group, captures the uncertainty, focus, and anticipation I felt at the time.

Everyday Writer

Turn the page.
Put care, attention.
Simple, right?
A popcorn kernel,
words of remembrance.
A hum.

The second experience that transformed my relationship to writing and research was reading Jessica Restaino's (2019) book *Surrender: Feminist Rhetoric and Ethics in Love and Illness*, an ethnographic study tracing the final years in the life of her research collaborator and friend, Susan Lundy Maute, as she lived and died with breast cancer. In a moving narrative that weaves reflection, qualitative data, and scholarly citation, Restaino (2019) explores her "unraveling as a researcher and writer, [her] loss of a more formalized research methodology, [her] increasing inability to separate the personal from the professional, the emotional from the intellectual and—ultimately—the profound, real loss of [her] collaborator" and friend (p. 54). In cases like these when we are faced with research that "undoes us" (p. 74), Restaino (2019) observes, traditional methods and frameworks fail us. In response, Restaino's book is a proposal, at times a plea, "for broken methods and contradiction, for creativity and too much feeling, for blurred genres and for doing the work that scares us" (pp. 12-13).

Ultimately, Restaino (2019) calls for methodological surrender, "a kind of letting go, a release, not only of what we already know how to do (practice) and what we think we know (epistemology) but also of our subjectivit(ies) as writers and researchers" (p. 13). Rather than provide a singular method for doing this work, she models for rhetoric and composition scholars committed to feminist research and writing the "practice of becoming ourselves through our work, that is, allowing the process of doing the work—however that must happen—to teach us to become new writers, researchers, friends" (p. 13). Reading Restaino,

I was hooked, compelled, smitten. It was the first time in a long while that I can recall reading an academic book cover to cover. I was enthralled by the writing, the message, the way vulnerability was modeled and invited, the call "for work that makes us human, over and over again" (p. 13). The following found poem is inspired from notes scrawled in my creased copy of Restaino's book.

Marginal Notes

On well-worn, dog-eared pages exuberant, hungry, searching—
Wow! Yes! I crave. Me? Lose myself?

Scary.

This is what I need [triple underlined]. How can I …
eventually, bright orange ink:

POETRY.

Slowly, I realized poetic inquiry—despite, or rather because of the vulnerability and fear it sparked in me—could be my methodological surrender, a way to stand with integrity in my writing and research, my personal and professional life, by listening, writing, knowing, being, and doing differently. These two experiences—the collaborative coaching endeavor and falling into Restaino's (2019) book—propelled me forward on a journey to explore how poetic inquiry might speak back to that nagging voice of frustration and misalignment, what it could mean for my life and my work.

As I read through interview transcripts from faculty writers in my study, often in preparation for our annual interviews, I began to notice passages that enticed me to create poems from their words as a way of engaging their experiences. I don't remember the first poem I crafted from transcripts, but I share the poem below, "Don't Make Me Tell You," composed from a transcript of one of my interviews with Jeanette,[1] to illustrate my growing excitement as I discovered the connection, insight and magic a poetic inquiry approach made possible.

In spring 2021, during our third of six annual interviews, Jeanette told me she was invited by an upper administrator to join a women's focus group created to help university leadership address the needs of vulnerable faculty during the pandemic. She told me "it was the most superficial, not-listening-to-you experience" she'd ever had. As a researcher, human, mother and woman-identifying faculty writer myself, I felt compelled to listen deeply and differently to her experience, and to go about my research and writing in ways that invited others to listen differently as well. Poetic inquiry provided a method and methodology for doing just that. As I applied arts-based literary techniques to my analysis of Jeanette's

1. I use pseudonyms to refer to study participants unless they opted not be assigned a pseudonym.

transcripts, arranging her words on the page with attention to line breaks, rhythm, breath, a more "*holistic, integrated perspective*" emerged (Leavy, 2020, p. 3) both in terms of my relational understanding of this writer's experience and my relationship to my work.

Don't Make Me Tell You

Don't make me tell you
that my child's mental health was in peril
all year, and I had to...

Don't make me tell you
that I have a family member in my home with dementia
who escalated when the attack on the White House happened
started wanting to buy guns.

Don't make me tell you that.

But understand it could have been that bad. Not just:
Oh gosh, we're all stuck at home watching Netflix,
and it's hard to get motivated,
and our kids are here.

It wasn't that.

It's: My daughter who was perfectly healthy before COVID
[has] a major depressive disorder
and I'm not sure she's okay.

Or: My family member's become paranoid
and delusional because he's watching TV all day
and the world is swirling,
and it feels really unsafe
as his dementia escalates.

If I would just
get up in the morning,
carve out an hour
it would be okay.…Right?

Composing the poem from Jeanette's interview transcript was a way for me to practice what Krista Ratcliffe (2005) calls "rhetorical listening," in the sense that it compelled me to "stand under" the discourses and material realities shaping

Jeanette's lived experience of forced quarantine during the pandemic. Listening to her story of "not being listened to" made visible dimensions of Jeanette's life that impacted her writing but were dismissed, ignored or forced to stay hidden by the institution from which she sought support. Writing the poem drove home the ways my experience of the pandemic was both similar to and different from Jeanette's and the reality that faculty so rarely acknowledge or anticipate the complexity of one another's lives. It crystallized how popular advice for improving scholarly productivity falls agonizingly short when it fails to account for writers' material realities and how miserably institutions fail to fully support faculty when they are unable to really listen.

Stimulating active participation and engagement, the poetic inquiry process resonates with "community listening," which Rachel C. Jackson theorizes as a form of meaning making rooted in Indigenous spaces that involves "collaboration between the teller and the listener" (Jackson & DeLaune, 2018, p. 44). This stands in stark contrast to Western research traditions intent on objectivity and extraction, which have caused profound damage to Indigenous and other communities (Smith, 2021; Wilson, 2008). Different from rhetorical listening in important ways, the notion of community listening emerges from Jackson's experience co-teaching a Kiowa cultural literacy class and her efforts to understand how Kiowa storytelling works. "Kiowa storytellers do not ask us to analyze their stories or take them apart," Jackson explains. "They ask us instead to put them together by bringing what we know—not as scholars but as humans—into storied space in order to engage and participate in the story, to share in making the narrative rather than taking control of it" (Jackson & DeLaune, 2018, p. 41). Indeed, writing "Don't Make Me Tell You," called me to be present in my research and writing in a way I never had before; rather than spit out findings assembled through an approved system of objective analysis, I found myself "[co-]creating knowledge based on resonance and understanding" (Leavy, 2020, p. 3) as poetic inquiry invited me to embrace a listening practice that felt aligned with Indigenous values of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility (Wilson, 2008).

Listening collaboratively to make (rather than extract) meaning requires "an openness to listening, to hearing, to knowing in different ways, to hearing silenced or marginalized voices, especially if one comes from a dominant culture or voice" (Hough, Sliep, & van Rooyen, 2025, p. 79). As Hough, Sliep, and van Rooyen emphasize in their contribution to *Poetic Inquiry as Research: A Decolonial Guide,* poetic inquiry throws into relief the reality that "all knowledge is inherently *positional* and *dependent* on the observer's biases and perspective" (p. 80). Writing poems that listen compels me to consistently consider how my biases and perspectives always inform how I relate to participants, interpret our interview transcripts, and arrange their words to make new (collaborative) meaning. It also lays bare what I do not know, keeps me open to different ways of knowing, and makes me determined to "keep listening and learning" (Hough, Sliep, & van Rooyen, 2025, p. 79).

As I explore in the chapters that follow, poetic inquiry calls me (again and again) into this way of listening, guides me to attend to how my unique positionality and lived experience inform my work for better and for worse, ever shaping what and how I know, what I deliberately or unknowingly ignore, how others relate to me, how they see and know themselves in my presence. Reckoning with how my intersectional identities position me within complex matrices of privilege and oppression (Crenshaw, 1989, 2015) is a dynamic, iterative, ongoing process that I return to in various contexts and for different purposes throughout this book. Here, I offer an initial articulation of a few main elements of my positionality and link them to questions I hold close as I relate and listen to, hold space for, and collaborate with participants in my research study.

- I am a white, cisgender, middle-aged woman whose mind and body are usually enabled as I move through the world. *How do I understand, or acknowledge that I may never fully understand, the lived experiences of faculty in my study who grapple with extreme mental health concerns, undergo cancer treatment, live in pregnant bodies, live in man-identified bodies differently privileged by patriarchal society, suffer daily the micro- and macro-aggressions of anti-Black racism?*
- I am the mother of a teenaged son and happily married to a white man who fully supports my life as a teacher, researcher, and writer. *What will I notice and miss in the lives of fellow motherscholars in my study with family dynamics similar to and different from my own? Women escaping abusive marriages? Single people, non-parents, those whose writing lives are impacted by the desire and struggle to pursue same sex relationships in a small college town? What will shared aspects of our experiences reveal and obscure?*
- I am an associate professor with tenure at the University of Oklahoma, a citizen settler on land that was home to native communities including the "Hasinais" Caddo Nation and "Kirikirʔiːs"[2] Wichita & Affiliated Tribes and on which 39 tribal nations currently dwell as a result of settler and colonial policies designed to assimilate Native people ("Land Acknowledgment Statement," 2020). *How does my professional location affect the stance I bring to research with faculty writers across ranks? What will it mean to recognize, honor and engage Indigenous worldviews and methodologies as a white settler scholar? How will I continue to learn about and support Indigenous people, culture, and history connected to the land on which I live and work?*
- I have living, college educated parents, who raised me in white middle class neighborhoods, helped me thrive in school and smoothed my access to resources including post-secondary and graduate education. *How will I maintain an openness to different ways of knowing and learning, to*

2. http://www.wichitatribe.com/media/18910/wichita.mp3

> *experiences of faculty writers who have been and continue to be marginalized, gaslighted, deemed outsiders and/or "presumed incompetent" by an academy never designed for them (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Niemann, Gutiérrez y Muhs, & González, 2020)?*

I recognize that these intersecting identity dimensions (among others) inform my experiences of privilege and oppression as a scholar and human, shape what I see and hear (and don't) as a researcher, and influence how I make sense of what I find. I acknowledge, too, that merely taking stock of how my identity descriptors and social locations distance me from participants in my study can lead to "othering"—negatively inflecting characteristics that set participants apart as representing that which is different from me (Hough, Sliep, & van Rooyen, 2025, p. 80). Poetic inquiry, though, sponsors a different kind of listening that goes beyond taking stock to taking care. Using the words of participants to compose research poems that avoid othering demands self-awareness and accountability, honest and continuous reckoning with positionality, and sustained reflection "on difficulties and parts of relating that may get lost in translation" (p. 79). An alternative to extracting information, or even facilitating a one-to-one, participant-to-researcher exchange, poetic inquiry offers an immersive process of meaning making that encourages me to ask what is missing, what is different, and what seems the same, and then to linger in those spaces, actively seeking out alternative perspectives and new knowledge and (re)committing to listening and learning.

For me, writing research poems feels like a "methodological cal[l]," a chance to "mark a different space" in my writing and research (Pelias, 2004, p. 11). The poems "collect in [my] body: an ache, a fist, a soup" (p. 11). This book is a result of splashing around, swimming, reveling in the soup; it is one of the first in writing studies to model and promote poetic inquiry as a form of methodological surrender that can "bring resonant frames of understanding" to research around writers and writing lives of all kinds (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 69). My journey as a researcher working with poetic inquiry is ongoing, but what I've experienced so far has convinced me of the potential value of a poetic approach to researching writing, writers, and writing lives. By sharing my journey I hope to reveal pathways for other researchers who may never have considered poetic inquiry in the context of writing research or their own research/writing practice. As I continue to feel my way forward, this book is my effort to document and share what I've tried and what I've discovered as well as to entice fellow writing studies researchers to think along with me about what poetic inquiry might bring to our collaborative endeavor.

What is Poetic Inquiry?

"'Poetic inquiry' is the use of poetry crafted from research endeavors, either before a project analysis, as a project analysis, and/or poetry that is part of or that constitutes an entire research project" (Faulkner, 2025, p. 195). "Merg[ing]

the tenets of qualitative research with the craft and rules of traditional poetry" (Leavy, 2020, p. 85), poetic inquiry researchers might write poetry as a form of fieldnotes or memoing or as a way to analyze data, represent findings, or as a vehicle for reflecting on our own embodied experiences as researchers and writers. In a poetic inquiry-based study "poetry *is* research" (Leavy, 2020 p. 85); poems become data, enact analysis, and invite complex interpretation.

Poetic inquiry has roots in women of color's "theory in the flesh," which Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (2015) explain is a way of theorizing from lived experience, "the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings" (p. 19). Theories in the flesh inhabit an epistemological stance (Calafell, 2010; Collins, 1989; Dillard, 2000; Hurtado, 2003; Madison, 1993; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981/2015; Pitts et al., 2019) that recognizes how the circumstances of minoritized lives generate experiences different from those in dominant groups and "deserve other forms of excavation and representation" (Beltrán, 2019, p. 146). Indigenous arts-based methodologist Romana Beltrán (2019) observes that because poetry can "facilitate access to our embodied knowledge" and resist "dominant processes of meaning-making into which we have been socialized" (p. 146), it is a promising medium for excavating and representing theories in the flesh. Anzaldúa famously uses poetry, along with textual fragments and other genres including prose, myth, song, dialogue, and so on, to theorize her lived experience as a "border woman" (Anzaldúa, 2021, p. 49) straddling a range of physical, psychological, cultural, linguistic, sexual and spiritual borders. Such creative acts, Anzaldúa (2015) explains, generate *conocimiento*, a form of spiritual inquiry and subversive knowledge, that "attempt[s] to bridge the contradictions in our experience" fusing personal realities "to create a politic born out of necessity" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 19). Toward that end, many women-of-color scholars use poetic forms and methods to privilege personal experience, embrace embodied epistemologies, and center theories in the flesh (Calafell, 2007; Dillard, 2006; Madison, 1993, 1994; Moraga, 2011).

In this spirit, qualitative researchers have turned to poetry to honor and represent embodied ways of knowing, being, and doing. Some use words from research interviews to create poetic transcriptions (Glense, 1997; Richardson, 1992), poetic representations (Richardson, 2001), or found poems (Butler-Kisber, 2012) that capture the essence of participants' experience, language, and/or cadence. Others write poems not based on participants' words but from scratch, using poetic devices to interpret data in ways that "allo[w] for the subjective responses of the researchers," an element not always valued in traditional qualitative research (Langer & Furman, 2004). Sometimes, when "data and interpretation merge into a single act, a single form," qualitative inquirers embrace poetry *as* research (Sullivan, 2004, p. 34). Although a plethora of terms and approaches have been used in countless adaptations of poetic inquiry (Leavy, 2020; Prendergast, 2009), the intention to use poetry to "synthesize experience in a direct and affective way" (Prendergast, 2009, p. xxii), to "present human phenomena in a manner that

preserves its *livedness*" (Furman et al., 2007, p. 302) remains constant. Monica Prendergast (2009) identifies three categories of research-driven poetry, all of which I model in this book: participant-voiced poetry, crafted from transcripts of interviews with one or more study participants, written entirely by a participant, or collaboratively written by participant and researcher; researcher-voiced poetry, crafted from research texts produced by the researcher, such as autoethnographic observations, reflective memos or field notes or generated from scratch by the researcher; and literature-voiced poetry, crafted using words from published scholarship (see also Leavy, 2020). Although the boundaries among categories can be porous and I've crafted poems—from reviewer comments, for example—that don't fit neatly in any category at all, the categories are useful for getting a sense of what poetic inquiry entails.

Participant-Voiced Poetry

Participant-voiced poetry, sometimes called found poetry, involves extracting words and phrases from research texts (such as qualitative interview transcripts) and arranging the words in poetic form. Also called poetic transcription, this method of using poetry to represent and analyze research resonates with feminists and women of color who theorize from "physical realities" and "flesh and blood experiences" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 19) in ways that bridge seeming contradictions in experience and meaningfully complicate conditions of living (Faulkner 2020). D. Soyini Madison (1993, 1994), for example, uses poetic transcription to honor, analyze, and represent storytelling performances emerging from/within Black oral traditions because, she says, in poetic form words are less "isolate[ed] from the movement, sound, and sensory body that give them substance" (1994, p. 46). In this spirit, Esther O. Ohito and Tiffany N. Nyachae (2019) use Black feminist poetry as a form of feminist critical discourse analysis to surface new insights about "the complex lives, lived experiences, and knowledges of Black girls and women" (p. 839). Noting the importance of the theoretical and epistemological constructs in which poetry is created, they generate "list poems" from research artifacts in the stylistic lineage of Black feminist poets (p. 843).

The poems "Writing, Like a Roadtrip" and "Don't Make Me Tell You," which I included previously in this introduction, are participant-voiced poems composed from interview transcripts gathered for my study of faculty writers. In the first, I arrange words from multiple participants to juxtapose the experience of the one and the many. In the second, which is composed of words from a single transcript from one participant, my aim was to capture one aspect of the experience of a woman-identified faculty member being a writer, mother, spouse, and caregiver, during the pandemic. Following is another participant-voiced poem with phrases gathered from multiple interviews with two different participants. Words on the left are from Kyle, a tenure track writer in health sciences, and the words on the right in italics are from Mark, a writer who left academia instead of going up for tenure despite

having a solid dossier. In the poem, I juxtapose their responses over the years to my question: How would you describe yourself as a writer in this moment?

I am a writer …

Who understands. Perfect
writer? Futile task.

Who is clear, compelling.

Who suffers. Not coming
easily, not feeling fluid.

Who doesn't want to need
writing to feel purpose, survive.

Who struggles. Always
a struggle.

Who wants to be a writer, produce
content, add to life, create.

Who needs to write more
time to be dedicated to craft.

Who is drawn to write but
every day not big brand.

Who needs to find time to write
about what I want to write.

Who wants to write to
connect, share, remember.

In these foregoing participant-voiced poems I employ the affordances of poetic style—imagery, line breaks, stanza arrangement, etc.—to artistically represent less visible dimensions of writers' lived experience. In doing so, the poems pull back the curtain to reveal aspects of faculty writing lives that cannot be addressed with traditional advice such as "carve out an hour for writing each morning" in the service of institutionally defined productivity-focused objectives.

Researcher-Voiced Poetry

Researcher-voiced poetry, poems crafted by or from texts produced by the researcher, become a different type of data as they explore how the researcher's

relationship with participants, research phenomena, and research study itself impact meaning making. Researcher-voiced poetry can take the shape of found poems crafted from fieldnotes, memos, or drafts of manuscripts aimed at publication. They can also be self-generated poems the researcher creates from scratch. The diamante poem "Swing" and "Marginal Notes" from the opening section of this chapter are examples of researcher-voiced poetry, poems written in my words capturing some aspect of my lived experience as a researcher in this context. Following is another self-generated poem, a haiku I penned on a chilly Monday morning after Halloween in 2021 as I struggled to make the most of the time I'd allotted to my writing and research that day. The poem offers a snapshot of what it felt like for me to be a faculty writer, writing about faculty writers in that moment.

Heavy, hooded blur
fat coffee-drenched tongue, sluggish
sloshy swallow: hope

Consider my poem next to the following excerpt from a participant-voiced poem, originally published in my article on resilience in faculty writing lives (Tarabochia, 2021, stanza 24), inspired by the many stories I'd collected about the crushing physical manifestations of the pressure and anxiety of high stakes writing for publication, writing on the tenure track:

Wake up hot, sweaty.
Awful, like being smashed down,
but with no way out.

Poetic inquiry as a methodology offers a mechanism for treating both types of poems as part of the research study. Taken together, they contribute to a textured, multifaceted view of the lived experience of faculty writers and the process of probing and representing writers' lives.

Researcher-voiced poems can also be used to grapple with research ethics, researcher subjectivity, and positionality, inherently gnarly issues that are central to qualitative human-subjects research. In "'I (We) Refuse to Be Silenced,'" Beltrán (2019) models the value of poetry for engaging in self-reflexivity, the practice of systematically considering power dynamics, hidden assumptions, and positional identities in relation to research processes and knowledge production. She describes beginning a session on self-reflexivity at the annual Society for Social Work and Research Convention by inviting participants to create "I am from" poems. Now a poetry exercise used across a range of contexts, the "I am from" poem emerged in 1993 when Kentucky poet Georgia Ellen Lyon compiled a series of lists about her life into a poem with lines that began "I am from … " and ended with "sights, sounds, places and people" (Beltrán, 2019, p. 146; Lyon, n.d.). "Paired with the frame of critical feminist scholarship as resistance," Beltrán explains, the poetic structure of the "I am from poem" becomes a prompt for reflexive praxis, for reflecting on

lived experience, representing the "situated self," and embracing "a type of vulnerability that [is] nonnormative" in academic spaces (p. 146). In a similar vein, methodologist Valerie J. Janesick (2016) offers a template for creating "I poetry," or identity poetry, that researchers can use to reflect on their role in a research project. Inspired by the promise of this approach to researcher-voiced poetry, I wrote the following poem to explore my orientation toward and articulate my investment in using poetic inquiry in my study of faculty writers (Tarabochia, 2021, Appendix A).

I am from straight, cisgender, slim, able-bodied, whiteness,
from educated, English speaking, property owning, middle class citizenship
from married mother, neurotypical, (mostly) mentally stable womanhood.
I am from "follow the rules," "confess your sins,"
and "hard work pays off."
Good girl, good student, good choices.
I am from check the details, put in the time,
butt in seat, and "do you get up?"
I am from crying
    at my desk, late, bone deep frustration
    on the stairs, baby asleep, what if I can't finish
    in the kitchen, across the island, no more to give.
Awake, drenched, heaving, pounding
heart burning.

The following haiku series on method is another example of researcher-voiced poetry inspired by Janesick (2016). Originally an element in a Japanese party game, the haiku form typically consists of three lines with five, seven, and five syllables respectively. Often part of longer five-line tanka poems written spontaneously and collaboratively chain-style, the formulaic parameters of the haiku invited "intellectual challenge" and "a bonding opportunity" for rowdy party-goers (Runyan, 2021, p. 146). The haiku evolved to be a more serious form designed to capture the essence of a moment. I wrote my haiku poems (Tarabochia, 2021, Appendix D) in response to the welcome urging from a *Peitho* reviewer to be clearer in my article manuscript about my method of composing research poems; the form helped me capture the essence of my composing experience and reflect on my stake in my poetic inquiry project.

Read their words, struggle.
Visceral connection
seeing myself there.
To find the story
each word amplifies the next

reverberating.
Heart pounds. Stomach drops.
cut pieces strike a ~~chord~~ nerve.
There we are, exposed.
Objective research,
evidence: "the data shows."
But the poet? Naked.
Is it them or me?
We (e)merge to discover
A shared thread—the light.

Composing these poems was a way for me to embrace the ambiguity and uncertainty of qualitative research, to avoid shying away from my responsibilities as a researcher even as I faced head on the challenges of enacting and explaining/justifying an unfamiliar methodology that felt difficult, and also achingly right, even as it raised important questions at the heart of human subjects research and academic writing.

Literature-Voiced Poetry

In a similar vein, literature-voiced poetry provides an artistic mechanism for engaging with published scholarship and theory, which becomes the source text for found poems "supported and contextualized with researcher statements" (Leavy, 2020, p. 90). The goal of this category of poetic inquiry is to "synthesize, process, and make meanings" of existing concepts and theories in ways that make visible the messiness of these processes and deliberately grapple with implications for the current inquiry (Prendergast, 2009, as cited in Leavy, 2020, p. 90). Page 55 from Jessica Restaino's (2019) book *Surrender: Feminist Rhetoric and Ethics in Love an Illness* became for me a source text with which to grapple with poetic inquiry as a form of methodological surrender in my research with faculty writers (Figure 1.1). The resulting poem and visual art have served as a touchstone for me as I follow where this project leads.

This particular type of literature-voiced poem is an erasure poem, also called critical or counter poem (Lahman, Richard, & Teman, 2019). In the spirit of what McGann and Samuels (2006) call "deformance," erasure poems radically interpret the source text by deforming it, manipulating it, even destroying it, to make it strange and open to novel readings. More specifically, erasure poetry embraces "the imaginative power of redaction" (Runyan, 2021, p. 134; see, e.g., Kleon, 2010) to discover complex meanings and to resist dominant structures and discourses that often enforce more utilitarian engagement with published literature (Faulkner 2020; Lahman, Teman, & Richard, 2019).

Rooting Surrender

Contradictions held
root-linking, music-bent
reinscribed unity, imagine
undoing, "unbecoming" rhythmic
mysteries unknown loss
grounded embrace: surrendering
forced to unlearn
to grieve

Figure 1.1. Example of erasure poem. Photograph by the author.

Multi-Voiced Poetry

Working across categories of poetic inquiry generates even more opportunities to put ideas-in-process in conversation in potentially rich, transformative ways. I wrote a series of poems, including found poems using Susan Walsh's (2006) article on resymbolization in arts-informed research and journal reviewer reports as source texts, as well as self-generated poems, as a way to grapple with issues of difference, subjectivity, methodology and representation (Tarabochia, 2021, Appendix C).

How—at a time of such racial pain—
does one hold deep connection and
respect for difference?
Where do you orient, author/researcher?
How do you engage and yet
keep your distance?[3]

"Poetry situates me …
through its very form."
"I too am the poem."
"I resymbolize what occurred …
according to my own life and
experiences."
"I cannot do otherwise."[4]

Respect difference
make myself vulnerable
listen, describe, feel.[5]

3. Found poem using as a source text the reviewer report I received in response to a manuscript I submitted to *Peitho*.
4. Found poem using published scholarship as a source text (Walsh, 2006, p. 990).
5. Author generated poem.

A final example includes two found poems—one from a journal reviewer report and one from personal correspondence with a colleague and fellow poetic inquirer Adam Rosenblatt—and a poem I generated reflexively articulating the process of composing data poems (Tarabochia, 2021, Appendix F):

Poems feel disconnected
from process that generated them.
Engage the poems.
Self-reflexive examination of
assembly process
what/how/why?[6]

Skeptical of long-winded passages
about my subjectivity,
earnest and transparent they may be.
They also re-center me me me.
Always power: feminist ethic of care,
making space for their words.[7]

Replace the poems
with "me, me, me"? *I resist.*
They "luxuriate."[8]

The Difference is Poetry

As is evident from the examples above, within each category of poetic inquiry, different genres or types of poems can be used according to the researcher's goals and curiosities. Some poetic forms and approaches that will be modeled throughout this book include:

- concrete poetry "presented in a physical shape that reinforces the poetic content" (Leavy, 2020, p. 95);
- composite poems crafted from the words of multiple participants to surface similarities and difference among individuals and groups (Commeyras & Montsi, 2000; Teman, 2010);
- profile poems crafted from the words of a single participant;
- poetry clusters, series of poems crafted around a particular theme as "a powerful way of expressing a range of subtle nuances about a topic while simultaneously producing a general overview" (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009, p. 4); and
- tandem found poetry, wherein "two found poems are created separately but at roughly the same time, from the same text, by the interviewer and the participant," often from an interview transcript (Burdick, 2011).

6. Found poem using as a source text the reviewer report I received in response to a manuscript I submitted to *Peitho*.

7. Found poem using as a source text personal communication from Adam Rosenblatt, October 25, 2020.

8. Author generated poem.

Across the many categories and forms, poetic inquiry researchers turn qualitative research material into poems to make "the world visible in new and different ways, in ways ordinary social science writing does not allow" (Denzin, 2014, p. 86). Readers and writers of typical qualitative research studies are accustomed to representation—of data, of participants, of experiences, of lives. But poetry is not representation; poetry is embodied presentation—"poetry is about showing, not telling, our (in)humanity and all of its mysteries" (Faulkner, 2020, p. 11). Whereas scientific representation strives to provide clear, objective, justifiable evidence for proposed meaning, poetic presentation is unabashedly ambiguous, emotional, a passionate invitation to consider, reflect, feel. In the words of poet-educator-scholar Carl Leggo (2008):

> Poetry does not invite readers to consume the text as if it were a husk that contains a pithy truth. Poetry is not a window on the world. Poetry invites us to listen. Poetry is a site for dwelling, for holding up, for stopping. … Poetry creates textual spaces that invite and create ways of knowing and becoming in the world. Poetry invites interactive responses—intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and aesthetic responses. Poetry invites a way of uniting the heart, mind, imagination, body, and spirit. (pp. 166-167)

While both poets and qualitative social science researchers seek to "evok[e] a snippet of human experience" (Leavy, 2020 p. 85), their orientation to those snippets, their goals in evoking them, and their hopes for how our readers encounter them diverge. The difference is poetry.

Communications researcher Sandra Faulkner (2020) thinks of poetry as "a distinct form of writing defined by alliteration, form, image, language use, line, metaphor, meter, rhythm, simile, structure, and syntax" (p. 11). Drawing on poet B.H. Fairchild's definition, she describes poetic practice as the use of "an array of rhetorical and prosodic devices of embodiment to achieve an ontological state, a mode of being, radically different from that of other forms of discourse" (as cited in Faulkner, 2020, p. 11). Poetic inquirers use poems to deepen understanding, express lived experience, honor relationality, promote reflexivity, and advocate for change in mind, emotion, individual behavior, and/or collective action. We are after different ways of knowing and being.

Why Poetic Inquiry?

Poetic inquiry is a "flourishing offshoot" of the more established branch of arts-based research that emerged in response to the "representational crisis of qualitative research"—the concern that participants' and researchers' voices could be "appropriated, over-shadowed or even silenced" in an effort to adhere to scientific rigor (Galvin & Prendergast, 2016, p. xi). According to Patricia Leavy (2020), critical schools of thought that "challenge traditional ways of knowing,"

including postmodern theory, postcolonial theory, feminist postmodernism, and feminist poststructuralist, provided rich context for the emergence of poetic expression in research as a methodological innovation also "concerned with producing situated and partial knowledge, accessing and magnifying subjugated voices, decentering authority, and paying attention to the discursive practices that shape experience and our articulation of human experience" (Leavy, 2020, p. 86). Embracing research as a "human endeavor" that seeks to "reflect the thickness of living," poetic inquiry offers holistic ways of being, understanding, relating, and representing (Galvin & Prendergast, 2016, p. xi).

As Kathleen T. Galvin and Monica Prendergast (2016) point out, the turn toward artistic means to meet "the demands inherent in the study of human worlds and human fragility" is not new (p. xi). In fact, they explain, poetic inquiry is rooted in a "longstanding philosophical heritage … concerned with human existence" (p. xii) that includes theorists such as Wilhelm Dilthey and William James writing about aesthetics, sensation, emotion, and perception as well 20th century phenomenological philosophers such as Husserl, Heidegger, and Gadamer (among others) interested in concrete lived experience. The long roots of poetic inquiry extend, as well, into the historic and proliferating relationship between creative work and research in the higher education environment (Smith & Dean, 2009). Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean (2009) recount enduring arguments for the value of practice-*led* research, wherein creative work constitutes a form of research with identifiable outputs, and wherein documenting and reflecting on creative practice can lead to insights that may be communicated as research. Practice-focused types of research are significant for signaling, valuing, and generating a type of knowledge that is "unstable, ambiguous and multidimensional" (Smith & Dean, 2009, p. 3), often richly imprecise, "emotionally or affectively charged" (p. 3), and just as vital as knowledge generated through "more theoretically, critically or empirically based research methods" (p. 2). In this tradition, poetic inquiry leverages a long-held awareness of what Patricia Sullivan (2012) calls "the liberating and critical power of art" (p. 2) to cultivate alternative ways of knowing and doing.

Part of a "growing 'aesthetic move' in the human and social sciences" (Galvin and Prendergast, 2016, p. xi), poetic inquiry offers researchers "a way of dwelling in nuance and intricacy" (Tse, 2014, p. 177). It captures "the thickness of living" without appropriating or silencing participants or losing the reflective power of researchers explicitly grappling with the "emotional labour that come[s] with the demands inherent in the study of human worlds and frailty" (Galvin & Prendergast, 2016, p. xi). Poetic inquiry leverages the affordances of creative processes and outputs to position qualitative researchers and participants "in fluid, dynamic, and relational terms" (Tse, 2014, p. 181) so that we might challenge and transform traditional forms of knowledge production and understand more deeply and complexly aspects of the human condition.

Poetic inquiry allows researchers to resist abstracting experiences into replicable behaviors and to situate them instead in the material bodies and contexts

and relationships that shape and are shaped by them. "In poetic form, words are not in isolation from the movement, sound, and sensory body that give them substance" (Madison, 1994, p. 46). Embodied experiences expressed through poetic inquiry are situated as well as accessible and relatable. Poetry captures *and* invites embodied experience, drawing attention to our shared humanity: we all have bodies. Forging connection through difference, poetic inquiry offers a new approach to learning about and from human subjects, a way of "materializing the material" (Schell, 2012, p. 137). It becomes a way of theorizing through lived experience: "Instead of coming in through the head with the intellectual concept, you come in through the backdoor with the feeling, the emotion, the experience" (Anzaldúa, 2000, p. 263).

To illustrate, below is a found research poem from my first interview with Sadie, a Black woman scholar who was pre-tenure at the time of our conversation in 2016. The poem demonstrates how poetic inquiry *feels* fundamentally different, for researcher-poets and for readers, from engaging with/in more traditional forms of qualitative research. Poetry makes writers and readers viscerally aware of our minds, bodies, spirits and emotions. As Laurel Richardson (2001) points out, the "body responds to poetry. It is *felt*" (p. 879).

Everyday Brilliance

When I became a faculty member, I experienced the real academy
Oh! You think I am an idiot, all of you people--rest of the world
thinks I am a stupid idiot. Oh! Constant onslaughts undermining who
I am anxious about my writing fearful about whether I will make tenure
elusive, traumatizing, so much at stake—Fight! Gear up! Exhausting.

Grew up poor, working class, rural south Louisiana.
Black women told me I was a smart little Black girl.
When the schools weren't serving me, I had Black women
in my life, everyday brilliance celebrated.

Born in [a Midwest metro], single mother worked all the time,
overcrowded schools; I just wasn't learning.

Second grade, white[9] teacher: I can't teach her, she can't read.
Aunt: It's your damn job to teach her to read.
Young new Black women's classroom: within weeks I was reading.

9. Following Sadie's preference, rooted in Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) practice, I do not capitalize "white" because it does not refer to a specific cultural group. I intentionally do not capitalize "white" throughout the book for the same reason.

The day my aunt realized, I sat in her chair, started reading.
She heard me, poked her head out the bathroom—
butt naked just remember—walked out—stark naked—
whole family there, danced around the house "Hallelujah!
Thank you Jesus!" She did all this. Crazy! Wonderful.
Second grade, seven years old, my aunt danced
Stark naked for *me* because … I'm about to cry …
I was reading.

Celebrations of everyday brilliance
left an indelible mark, affirmed
I was a smart little Black girl.

Community of Black women supported my type of intelligence,
recognize[d] the capacity to think well through everyday life.
[When] I internalize not-good-enoughness, this loud voice in my head:
white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal institutions have been
trying to kill you. Examples across your life, historical pattern.
And that voice becomes louder, in my head.

The women in my past have given that voice
a megaphone.

[Pause.] Swallow. *Breathe*. Even now as I type and re-read this poem, I experience it viscerally. It evokes a bodily response. This poem drives home (to my head, heart, chest, and gut) how, why and to what effect so many writers from minoritized groups experience the tenure process as "elusive, traumatizing." Poetic inquiry is a relational methodology. Whether or not researchers have had an experience described by a participant, the embodied experience of a poem, crafted from participants words, connects. Researchers use poetic inquiry to forge connection through difference. By "jar[ring] people into seeing and/or thinking differently" (Leavy, 2020 p. 22), poetic inquiry can support social justice commitments, stimulating empathy, compassion, and awareness and moving readers toward transformation of thought, perspective, behavior and action.

Just as poetic inquiry is valuable as a research methodology that challenges existing norms and ways of knowing, it is also a subversive writing methodology for researchers driven to critically question how they have been taught to "compose, report, organize, position and narrate scholarship and research" (Waite, 2019, p. 42). Poetic inquiry creates opportunities to "write in queer(er) ways," (Waite, 2019, p. 42) by experimenting with forms and practices that challenge common standards and expectations for academic writing. According to Stacey

Waite (2019), queer poet and scholar of composition and pedagogy, the effort to queer academic writing practices is as futile as it is necessary "because writing itself is institutional—our language and its regulations always already constituted by dominant narratives and disciplinary conventions" (p. 43). However, says Waite, the impossibility shouldn't keep us from writing queer(er) and "relish[ing] the failure of doing so" (p. 43). Poetic inquiry invites composing practices that embrace the "queer art of failure" (Halberstam, 2011) not to avoid rigor and responsibility but to uphold relational accountability. For scholars determined to actively "grapple with the undeniable impossibility of writing, the undeniable impossibility of linear forms, singular voices, conclusions, dependable narratives, and discernable data" (Waite, 2019, p. 43) poetic inquiry is an ideal instrument, a perfect subversive writing methodology for those who are certain only that "knowledge is partial, failed and fragmented" and that we must continue to research and write anyway (Waite, 2019, p. 43).

Feedback from a well-meaning and enthusiastic reviewer on one of the first article manuscripts featuring poetic inquiry I submitted for publication illuminates how the composing practices at the heart of poetic inquiry engage tensions between the urgency and impossibility. "Situating this piece as part of a discourse on 'failure,'" my reviewer noted, "by pointing out that all research is subjective and incomplete, and by asking readers to listen to silences and what isn't on the page, the author gives themselves an escape hatch for having to create an essay that closes its own loopholes, yet doing so would strengthen the piece." In valuing coherence, cohesion, closed "loopholes" and "strong" scholarship, the reviewer communicated reluctance to fully embrace poetic inquiry as a queer(er) writing practice. However, the same reviewer commented: "I feel a tension in this document between the experimental poetic methods the author is trying to advance and the traditional modes of writing and citation used.…I wondered whether this piece could be accompanied by some untraditional texts or just more attention paid to cutting away some of the more traditional aspects to make the style cohere throughout." My reviewer simultaneously craved a manuscript that more radically resisted traditional academic genre norms *and* achieved stylistic coherence, a normative expectation that queer writing often resists. My reviewer identified the paradoxical challenge and affordance of poetic inquiry, the opportunity to move doggedly if incrementally toward an ever-receding horizon of change.

Because fields and disciplines are constructed through adherence to normative assumptions about research and writing, to get somewhere other than where we've always been, we must "purposefully engage in acts of disruption and subversion" (Waite, 2019, p. 49). In that spirit, poetic inquiry works as what queer rhetor Hilary Glasby (2019) would call a queer writing studies methodology, one that "take[s] us closer to those dark, stagnant places we tend to avoid or understand as nonproductive" (p. 28). Those places, says Glasby (2019) "can offer insight and meaning through mess and dis-ease" if researchers have the tools to engage them (p. 28). Just such a tool, poetic inquiry "call[s] to the surface the

attitudes and assumptions we bring" not only to research but to academic writing as well, and invites us to notice and examine the origins and effects of our "dominant inheritances" (Waite, 2019, p. 50). It is a writing methodology for those of us compelled to ask hard questions about why we are here, researching and writing about these things in this way and ponder how we might be and do differently.

Ethical Considerations

The many affordances of poetic inquiry make it a promising choice for critical researchers in a range of contexts, with various subjects and purposes. Samantha Cooms and Vicki Saunders (2024), two First Nation's women, use autoethnographic perspectives to explore the role of poetic inquiry in decolonizing research. "The nonlinear way in which data are represented in poetry," they attest, "means that it can attend to the intersectional experience of oppression due to race, gender, religion, class, or disability" (p. 5). Moreover, poetic inquiry can foster community identity for groups oppressed by dominant structures and frameworks, make visible experiences of harm, discrimination, resilience and resistance on individual and systemic levels, and improve empathy and understanding by stimulating emotion and imagination in audience members (Cooms & Saunders, 2024). As more and more social science researchers across fields and disciplines recognize such benefits and embrace poetic inquiry for these purposes, ethical considerations are essential.

Lori A. Chambers (2023), a Canadian researcher of African descent, reiterates the long history of poetry as a "knowing practice" and part of a "culture of resistance" for people minoritized, marginalized and/or persecuted through systemic oppression (p. 1134). Based on her efforts to "interpret, represent, and re-tell" (p. 1133) experiences of African immigrant women living with HIV in ways that are "grounded in participants' home knowing" (p. 1133), Chambers (2023) argues that poetic inquiry can be a culturally responsive methodology "when conducted with, for and by, people with an experiential understanding of its decolonizing potential and cultural reverence" (p. 1149). Likewise, in her study of minoritized youth activism, African American poet-researcher Camea Davis (2021), found that poetic inquiry offers "new entry into qualitative research for researchers and participants that do not neatly fit into … identities sanctioned as 'normative' in academia" (Davis, 2021, p. 114)—white, male-identifying, hetero, Eurowestern, enabled, etc.

Poetic inquiry also has affordances for those, like me, who share many "sanctioned" identities. As Davis (2021) explains, because "poet-researcher[s] [are] constantly tasked with answering who am I, who are we, and what might be/what possibilities exist" (p. 116), the process of poetic inquiry can be a vehicle for writing through our biases and assumptions and crafting reflexively informed, explicitly collaborative, re-presentations of data and vital, if mutable, insights and findings. In their introduction to *Language, Land and Belonging: Poetic Inquiries*, Margaret McKeon and Natalie Honein (2023) explain that—because poetic inquiry invites

"a continual process of questioning, of welcoming, of awareness"—it can be "an act of defiance, a way to learn to unlearn" (p. 4). Indeed, many researchers use it "as a reflexive practice to improve ethical research practice, particularly when uncovering insights into power imbalances, bias and expectations which aligns well with decolonisation principles" (Cooms & Saunders, 2024, p. 12). Nevertheless, warns Cree scholar Cash Ahenakew (2016), poetic researchers must take care not to instrumentalize non-dominant ways of knowing and being and attend carefully to "the paradoxes and limitations of translating" between spaces (p. 337).

It is important to acknowledge that the very aspects of poetic inquiry that speak to its decolonizing potential "—positionality, voice, and representation—present challenges" and important ethical considerations for poetic inquirers (Chambers, 2023, p. 1149). For example, my own poetic inquiry into the lives of faculty writers, which I draw on in this book, is not decolonial in the sense that while it offers insights that resist Western, Eurocentric methods and logics, it does not directly benefit Indigenous people and communities; it doesn't improve conditions or keep people from dying (Smith, 2021). Although I hope to suggest and inspire the potential for poetic inquiry to embrace relational responsibility and materially impact human rights and social justice efforts, my current project doesn't move beyond decolonization on a discursive or metaphorical level (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Following the lead of Ehren Hulmut Pflugfelder and Shannon Kelly (2022), when I consider my own subjectivities, relations, responsibilities and complicity in the context of my current poetic inquiry, I concede it might be more apt to call it "anti-colonial" (p. 69)—part of a larger effort to disrupt colonial influences on qualitative methodology and ways of listening in qualitative research.

Another ethical consideration for poetic inquirers involves confronting the reality of utilizing anti-colonial, decolonial and other critical methodologies in the context of the neoliberal academy. Ahenakew (2016) laments the trouble with grafting, or "transplanting ways of knowing and being from a context where they emerge naturally to a context where they are artificially implanted" (p. 323). Likewise, Chambers (2023) asks if poetic methods can really constitute a decolonizing praxis in the context of the "current Eurowestern centrism of academic scholarship" given that "academic knowledge production" including dissemination requirements "is not currently structured for diverse knowing practices" (p. 1150)? Are "poetic retellings" destined to remain "ornamental to rather than representative of scholarly thought" (Chambers, 2023, p. 1150)? Can poetic inquiry avoid "reducing the world to what can be captured by thought" and imagine ways to "research 'otherwise'"(Ahenakew, 2016, p. 324)?

I believe poetic inquiry has the potential to forge ways of being and researching otherwise. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that while poetic inquiry can certainly be a tool for enacting epistemologies rooted in relationships including "interpersonal, intrapersonal, environmental and spiritual relationships, and relationships with ideas" (Wilson, 2008, p. 74; see for example McKeon, 2019), it is not inherently so. Poet Sheila Stewart (2019) explains "Poetry can both

aspire to contribute to a more equitable society and reinforce the status quo, in some cases directly contributing to the project of colonization" (p. 67). Poetic inquiry researchers must be diligent about considering and addressing how the very cracks and gaps that invite new relations, perceptions, ways of feeling and (not) knowing can reinforce oppressive systems, structures, stories, and dynamics.

Because research poems are open to interpretation, for example, those who write them must question how they might resonate or not with readers unfamiliar with content, context, perceptions and experiences represented. "What resonates with people with insider perspectives," Chambers (2023) explains, "might not induce the same feeling or meaning among audience members from different social locations" (p. 1150). How might assumptions, stereotypes, and biases shape interpretations in harmful, even oppressive ways? What happens, for example, when language diversity is a consideration and interpretations must work across languages and translations (Chambers, 2023)? What can poetic inquirers hope to do in the face of such challenges?

These questions and considerations are vital and should remain ever-present in the minds of researchers and readers compelled by the radical potential of poetic inquiry. At the same time, the only way to make space for this kind of work is to forge the space ourselves by doing the work in all its partiality, inadequacy, uncertainty, and risk. Poetic inquiry provides a vehicle and scaffold for doing just that.

Who Practices Poetic Inquiry?: Alignments and Possibilities

Social science researchers from across disciplines—including anthropology, education, English, nursing, social work, women's studies, psychology, sociology, and counseling—and from around the world employ poetic inquiry to artistically engage with and represent qualitative data in ways that conjure new ways to understand human experience (Prendergast, 2009). Since its inception in 2007, the International Symposium on Poetic Inquiry (ISI) has convened every two years, cultivating community among those who use poetry as, in, and for research. The symposium has generated a diverse collection of edited books,[10] including two foundational collections, *Poetic Inquiry: Vibrant Voices in the Social Sciences* (Prendergast et al., 2009) and *Poetic Inquiry II: Seeing, Caring, Understanding* (Galvin & Prendergast, 2016), which offer international compendia of works from scholars in the US, UK, Canada and Australia. As Vanessa Tse (2014) notes in her review of the first volume, contributors to these collections demonstrate the capacity of poetic inquiry to avoid "exclusively privilege[ing] cerebral understanding" so as to honor "the visceral stirrings that comprise human phenomena" (p. 177). The groundbreaking collection, *Poetic Inquiry for the Human and Social Sciences: Voices from the South and North* (van Rooyen & Pithouse-Morgan,

10. A list of books written by ISI conference delegates is available at http://www.poeticinquiry.ca/books-and-collections.

2024b), was inspired by the ISPI 2022, characterized for the first time by a presence from the Global South. The goal of the symposium and the collection was to offer "new ways to think about intersectionality by using poetry's ability to connect, evoke, and voice that which has been silenced" (Pithouse-Morgan & van Rooyen, 2024, p. 2) and to think more expansively about poetic inquiry research by "recognizing the contributions of different poetic traditions, cultural heritages, and ways of knowing" (p. 2). Contributors include poets, practitioners and scholars from Kenya, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, South Africa, South Korea, the United Arab Emirates, Belgium, Denmark, and the Netherlands among other places.

Many researchers from a wide range of disciplinary and geographical contexts embrace poetic inquiry to facilitate their commitments to transformative work. Indeed, Heidi van Rooyen and Raphael d'Abdon (2020) describe it as "a practical and powerful means for reconstitution of worlds." Because poetic inquiry "recognize[s], acknowledge[s], and appreciate[s] diverse ways of knowing, being and doing" (Cooms & Saunders, 2024, p. 3), it aligns well with radical research traditions including decolonizing methodologies, Indigenous methodologies, feminist and queer methodologies and methodologies rooted in disability studies. In what follows, I briefly outline some ways researchers working in these methodological traditions use poetic inquiry to challenge "Western epistemic traditions that favor objectivity, divisions between mind and world and research methods that support these ways of knowing" (van Rooyen & d'Abdon, 2020).

Decolonizing Methodologies

By decentering the academic voice and resisting hegemonic notions about academic authority, poetic inquiry "suggests a way to decolonize knowledge production" (van Rooyen & d'Abdon, 2020). As van Rooyen and d'Abdon explain, poetic inquiry

> is a decolonizing strategy in that it encourages greater collaboration and coexistence between researchers and research subjects, in which the former have an opportunity to escape the prison of academic jargon, and the latter are allowed to speak for themselves in new, empowering ways.

Indeed, researchers with decolonizing commitments gravitate to poetic inquiry because it pursues "epistemic diversity by foregrounding practices and interpretive frames that are still permeated by coloniality" (van Rooyen & d'Abdon, 2020). "The poignancy, musicality, rhythm, mystery and ambiguity of poetry are well suited for oral traditions," for example, and "invite users to engage creatively with language and experience" (Cooms & Saunders, 2024, p. 10).

Drawing on work by Botswanan scholar Bagele Chilisa (2020), Chambers (2023) describes poetic inquiry as a "culturally responsive" arts-based method that

"respond[s] to the social, political and historical contexts of knowledge generation for people from colonized cultures" (p. 1134). Chambers uses poetic inquiry to "re-fin[d] [her] ways of knowing as a person of African descent brought up in a Caribbean oral storytelling culture" (p. 1148). In a similar vein, Britton Williams (2023) and Camea Davis (2021) root poetry and poetic ways of knowing in call and response as an interactional form they experienced as ceremony, method, epistemology, and invitation to become.

Poetic inquiry enables researchers to engage means of expression and ways of knowing, being, and becoming often excluded by "assumptions and expectations attached to Eurocentric academic writing" and research (Williams, 2023, p. 61). In this way, it has been a valuable tool for researchers dedicated to forwarding "a global push to decolonize and recognize multiple kinds of knowledge" (van Rooyan & Pithouse-Morgan, 2024a, p. 259) by challenging "hegemonic epistemic assumptions that separate the mind, heart, and body, venerate objectivity and replication, and restrict research procedures to those that firmly establish these ways of knowing" (van Rooyan & Pithouse-Morgan, 2024a, p. 258). Importantly, as Tuck and Yang (2012) have argued, decolonization is not synonymous with critical, anti-racist, social justice frameworks. When used as a metaphor for any liberatory effort, decolonization becomes "an empty signifier" (p. 7) that ultimately "recenters whiteness and resettles theory" (p. 3). According to Tuck and Yang (2012):

> decolonization in the settler colonial context must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted; that is, *all* of the land, and not just symbolically. (p. 7)

Thus poetic inquiry, even when it is culturally responsive and actively pursues epistemic diversity and justice, may not always constitute decolonial work.

While poetic inquiry is not a straightforward, uncontentious means of pursuing decolonial research, for qualitative researchers like Urmitapa Dutta (2021) research poetry has "created and served as cracks through colonial, imperialist, neoliberal, and patriarchal ways of being" (p. 599). In her research in solidarity with Miya communities in Northeast India, Datta gravitated toward what she calls "insurgent poetry," a form of "undisciplining" (p. 602) that "allows for political intimacies, for intertwined histories, for affective connectedness, and for solidarity—an onto-epistemological reorienatation" (p. 603). Her move to research poetry, Dutta (2021) notes, was not incidental, as resistance poetry has long been central to Miya communities as well as essential for the decolonial, Indigenous, Third World, and Adivasi feminists informing her work. In other words, poetry "represented critical sites for decolonial resistance that not only disrupt the colonial, imperialist, patriarchal, heteronormative gaze but as importantly commit to lived struggles anchored in mutuality, solidarity, reciprocity and justice" (p. 600).

Dutta (2021) found "the modality of insurgent poetics" to be a vital medium for articulating "alternative horizons, experiences, and ways of knowing in ways that defy and transgress colonial rationalities and hierarches" (p. 604). In that spirit, van Rooyen and d'Abdon's 2025 collection offers examples, explanations, questions and heuristics for approaching poetic inquiry as a decolonizing research method. In sum, poetic inquiry has proven to be one promising if imperfect tool for contributing to the decolonial project.

Indigenous Methodologies

According to van Rooyen and d'Abdon (2025), a key principle for decolonial research is acknowledging and respecting Indigenous worldviews. Tending to ways of "knowing beyond the rational to include body, soul, and spirit to make sense of the world" (van Rooyan & Pithouse-Morgan, 2024a, p. 258), poetic inquiry is "well-suited to epistemic standpoints grounded in [I]ndigenous knowing practices and participatory frameworks" (Chambers, 2023, p. 1149). Research is ceremony within an Indigenous paradigm, explains Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2008); the purpose "is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves," to maintain "relational accountability" (p. 11). As a "relational research practice concerned with the self and self-in-relation" (McKeon & Honein, 2023, p. 1), with "particularity, complexity, and transformations," (p. 4) poetic inquiry offers a mechanism for engaging Indigenous methodologies.

In in his study of tutors in an alternative learning organization in Auckland City, New Zealand, Adrian Schoone (2020) uses poetic inquiry to makes sense of research fragments in "an artistic and phenomenological way" (p. 39). He creates poetic constellations to "represent the essences of tutors' lived experiences" (p. 41). Constellating is unlike triangulation, a common strategy of using multiple forms of data collection to enhance validity in qualitative research, in that it is not about proving the soundness of a particular interpretation. Constellating is also unlike crystallization, a practice Laurel Richardson describes as "combin[ing] symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach" in order to provide "a deepened, complex, and thoroughly partial understanding" of a topic (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 963). Poetic constellations do not seek to "pull together" (Schoone, 2020, p. 40) meaning at all, but to honor the gaps, the beautiful "dark spaces" (p. 40) between fragments of found poetry, each becoming "a universe unto itself" (p. 40).

Schoone demonstrates constellating as a relational practice. Aware of his positionality as a pākehā (Māori name for a New Zealander of European descent) working with a high proportion of Pasifika students in Aotearoa (New Zealand), a place largely inhabited by Māori people, Schoone (2020) creates constellations to honor resonance with the *mauri* (the Māori life source). Research poems are re/formed and re/imagined from reader to reader and moment to moment,

"yielding alternative essences and understandings," keeping the "the research breathing and therefore 'alive'" (Schoone, 2020, p. 40).

In recognition of the deep resonance of poetic inquiry with Indigenous ways of knowing, the Seventh International Symposium on Poetic Inquiry was held in Halifax, Nova Scotia (also known as Mi'kma'ki, the traditional territory of the Mi'kmaq) in Canada and invited participants to "inquir[e] into their relationships to ancestral languages and lands, with Indigenous participants speaking of the reparative importance of their languages and cultures in the face of ongoing colonial violence" (McKeon & Honein, 2023, p. 1). The book *Language, Land and Belonging: Poetic Inquiries* (Honein & McKeon, 2023) emerged from the symposium and includes contributions from academics, performers, activists, and artists from a range of global contexts each "reflect[ing] on many aspects of relational, ancestral, and community repair through poetic inquiry" (p. 1). The contributors and others invested in Indigenous epistemologies, including those authoring chapters in section two of Faulkner and Cloud's (2019) *Poetic Inquiry as Social Justice and Political Response*, use the "reflective practice of poetry writing as a way to honor [I]ndigenous people and their land" (p. 45) and explore connections between identity, settler colonialism, belonging and place. "Through poetry, as artful inquiry," poet Margaret McKeon (2019), a self-identified colonizer raised in a Western worldview, models how poet-researchers and researcher-poets alike can lean into Indigenous ways of knowing, come to "dwell in complexity rather than easy conclusions" (p. 57), and "learn how to walk with worldviews differently" (p. 59). The symposium and edited collections demonstrate how poetic inquiry facilitates Indigenous methodologies, honors "bodily, emotional, and intuitive-spiritual knowing" (McKeon, 2019, p. 59), and values forms of meaning making rooted in relationality.

Feminist and Queer Methodologies

Poetic inquiry compliments feminist and queer rhetorics and methodologies as well in part because it is embodied inquiry—one that attends to sights, smells, sounds, tastes, textures and bodily movement, and extends beyond the discursive to the material (Faulkner, 2018a). In her ethnography *Real Women Run* (2018c), Faulkner demonstrates poetic inquiry as a form of feminist embodied analysis to query and queer "embodied experiences in everyday relational life, of which running and the interplay between physicality, emotional life, and intellectual life is a part for women who run" (Faulkner, 2018a). She poetically analyzes 41 interviews with women-identified runners, crafts an autoethnography of her participation as a runner in the 2014 Gay Games, and includes critical content analysis of websites and blogs targeted toward women who run. Through narrative poetry, haiku, found poetry and poetic transcription, Faulkner (2018c) demonstrates how research poetry "can not only show embodiment, it can be an embodied experience" (Faulkner, 2018a) for researchers and readers alike. When it comes to

research, Faulkner (2025) expounds, "poetry promises to return researchers back to the body to demonstrate how our theories arise out of embodied experience" (p. 199). "A poem becomes *embodied experience*" for readers, Faulkner (2025) continues, "when audiences feel *with*, rather than *about* a poem; they experience emotions and feelings *in situ*" (p. 214).

Embodied experiences and emotions conjured through poetic inquiry cultivate empathy and human connection in ways that honor the historical "use of art, performance and narrative … in many queer and feminist political rights movements" (Denton & Cain, 2023, p. 139) and support the "antinormative principles" of queer theory and praxis (Denton & Cain, 2023, p. 144). Queer researchers Michael Denton and Leia K. Cain (2023) find narrative and arts-based research methods to be particularly powerful for constructing knowledge with queer participants and creating situated queer epistemologies. They describe various ways they each have used the blended methodology in their research. Denton, for example, has used narrative and ABR to "highlight the neglected experiences of gay men living with HIV (GMLH) in higher education" (Denton & Cain, 2023, p. 143), and Cain has used them to "explore how collegians describe the complicated intersection of being queer and southern within the U.S. Bible Belt" (p. 143). Denton and Cain (2023) appreciate the "historical association of art and narrative with queer resistance and worldmaking" (p. 139) and the ways arts-forward methods, "speak to … values of mutuality, reciprocity, and presenting complex, sensitive, and holistic portrayals of participants while still allowing for examination of oppressive dynamics (e.g. cissexism, genderism, heterosexism, trans oppression)" (p. 139), qualities that align with goals and commitments at the heart of queer methodologies.

Poetic inquiry also aligns with queer praxis in that it "attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence" (Halberstam, 1998, as cited in Faulkner, 2018a). Drawing on Jack Halberstam's definition of queer methodology, Faulkner (2018a) articulates "a scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior." In her chapter on queering sexuality education in family and school, Faulkner (2018b) models poetic collage as a queer scavenger methodology, juxtaposing current event headlines about reproductive justice, sex-ed curriculum, and conversations with her daughter about sex and sexuality to invite "broader understandings about communication and sexuality education than a reliance on one tradition" (p. 26) or source would allow. In true queer form, Faulkner's collage reiterates the multiplicity and instability of language, truth, and reality.

Because poetic inquiry directly engages the complex relationship between language and reality, it aligns with the spirit of queer rhetorics, which William P. Banks, Matthew B. Cox, and Caroline Dadas (2019) define as "queer theory in action" (p. 10). In particular, poetic inquiry resonates with three queer rhetorics—rhetorics of

intentionality, failure, and forgetting—in ways that illustrate its potential for queer research and praxis (Banks et al., 2019; Banks & West-Puckett, 2015). Rhetorics of intentionality challenge "heteronormative rhetoric that values outcomes, that privileges the finished product over ongoing processes and practices" (Banks et al., 2019, p. 12), and that judges outcomes and products against normative criteria. Rather than pursue an objective outcome, poetic inquirers enact and support tentative, collaborative, recursive ways of knowing that continually fluctuate and shift over time.

Focusing on intention over outcome means questioning the neoliberal obsession with success. Indeed, poetic inquiry resonates with rhetorics of failure as a "promiscuous metho[d]" (Banks et al., 2019, p. 14) favoring arts-forward approaches that might seem "frivolous" and "irrelevant" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 6) in the face of serious research and scholarship. Research poems, in their paradoxical concrete abstraction, destabilize objective meaning by inviting multiple interpretations in any given moment across cognitive, material, emotional, and spiritual dimensions; they beg the question "why *this* meaning at *this* time and under *these* circumstances" (Banks et al., 2019, p. 11). The ambiguity of poetic meaning resists the notion that we can ever really know—ourselves, others, anything—embracing instead what Patti Lather (2007), citing anthropologist Kamala Visweswaran, calls "knowing through not knowing" (Visweswaran, 1994, as cited in Lather, 2007, p. 17). Poetic inquirers do not define success as knowing once and for all and failure becomes a valuable frame for rethinking "what we are (really) searching for—and what we think we've found" (Banks et al., 2019, p. 14).

Poetic inquiry also gives researchers embracing queer rhetorics and methods a way to explore what has *not* been found, to consider what has been "(strategically) forgotten" (Banks, et al., 2019, p. 15). Many poetic inquiry projects feature lost or forgotten people, stories, experiences, not to "rescue" (Banks et al., 2019, p. 16) them but to self-reflexively consider what must be forgotten to keep certain subjects in focus. Poetic inquirers continuously ask what they might need to forget to discover something new and how they might hold space for such tensions in their work. "These particular queer rhetorics—of intentionality, failure and forgetting," argue Banks et al. (2019) offer a launching pad for considering how "we might engage queer rhetorics at the level of methodology" (p. 16). Poetic inquiry provides researchers with one promising, underexplored way of methodologically engaging those rhetorics and grappling with emergent possibilities.

Disability Studies and Crip Methodologies

Many features that align poetic inquiry with queer rhetorics and methodologies make it a promising tool for researchers in disability studies (DS) committed to "cripping" traditional research practices. "From the beginning," Margaret Price and Stephanie Kerschbaum (2016) point out, "DS scholar have understood that methodology is a key mechanism of disabled peoples' oppression," traditionally conducted by nondisabled researchers with a focus on scrutinizing bodily and

mental impairments (p. 23). In contrast, critical disability studies (CDS), "*itself* a methodology" (Price & Kerschbaum, 2016, p. 23), crips traditional research practices by exposing normative structures along with the power dynamics that uphold them and by working to reconsider and restructure oppressive frameworks (Minich, 2016). Crip methodology, then is "not about studying the supposedly broken bodyminds of the abject. Rather, it is about studying broken systems, broken attitudes, broken gazes" (Price & Kerschbaum, 2016, p. 23).

In this spirit, the rise of disability or crip poetics among disabled writers and researchers has specifically sought "to resis[t] an ableist tradition of bodily representation in favor of rewriting cultural narratives by turning explicitly to lived disabled experience" (Lau, 2020). Travis Chi Wing Lau (2020), for example, describes the "cripistemological process of learning to live with my pain" as "the work of poetry." He discovered in disability poetry, a way of "attending to pain's languages and forms, its poetics" and experimenting with new ways of "conceptualizing embodiment in and through language" (Lau, 2020). Likewise, in her lyric autoethnography, Shelby Swafford (2023) takes on cultural assumptions about the unknowability of pain (Scarry, 1985). She "blend[s] poetics and personal narrative" and "textually constructs crip time" to explore her experience living with chronic pain and illness (p. 130). "Using the numerical rating pain scale as a heuristic," Swafford (2023) "tell[s] a story of [her] body that resists compulsory nostalgia"—the notion that a disabled body longs for a self before disability—as well as "curative frameworks, and ableist temporalities" (p. 130). Embracing crip time is a way of "bending the clock," enacting a "temporal reorientation away from normative/ableist/straight time and toward disabled subjectivities" (Swafford, 2023, p. 131). Poetic inquiry is well suited for representing crip time because, like disabled minds and bodies themselves, both are messy, surprising, striking and spectacular. Indeed, many disabilities studies scholars (Esposito, 2014; Ferris, 2004, 2008; Kuppers, 2007) "have recognized the possibilities of poetic inquiry for writing their bodies in crip language, for capturing the particularities of living in a disabled body through poetics" (Swafford, 2023, p. 134).

A self-identified Middle Eastern disabled scholar Shadhd Alshammari (2022) speaks to the value of poetic inquiry as a form of embodied activism that "allows [her] disabled body to move on paper, effortlessly, without obstacles" (p. 364). Her autoethnographic poetic inquiry considers the impact of the Gulf War on Palestinian families and examines concepts of disability, resilience, and historical trauma. She starts with memories and conversations with her Palestinian grandmother and mother, which she "morph[s] into poetic fragments" (Alshammari, 2022, p. 364) to critically and creatively represent her experience living with multiple sclerosis and interrogate complex attitudes about disability rooted in Palestinian culture and personal discourse. Poetic inquiry enables Alshammari (2022) to interrupt Western understandings of disability and ableism by probing how "a culturally specific discourse considers disability and war terminology, not as simple metaphors, but as real and lived experiences of historical trauma" (p. 371).

Just as Alshammari (2022) and Swafford (2023) challenge the notion that experiences of bodily disability are inexpressible through language, disability scholars and researchers use poetic inquiry to resist the troubling belief that cognitively disabled people are arhetorical, "incapable or outside of language" (Lau, 2020), a normative assumption that "underpins the dehumanization of neurodivergent people" (Lau, 2020; See also Yergeau, 2017). For example, embracing poetry as embodied, multisensory exploration, doctoral student Kate Roberts Bucca (2023) offers a "schizo-poetic and visual inquiry informed by disability poetry and schizo-poetics" (p. 100) to consider the experiences of graduate students with mental illness in relation to those of their neurotypical peers and contribute to conversations around disability in academia. Schizo-poetry utilizes features of poetic inquiry to disrupt notions of coherence as it strives to represent "seemingly incoherent experience" and create "a feeling of *rightness* … even if conveying nontypical or nonsensical convergences of ideas and words" (Bucca, 2023, p. 104). For Bucca (2023), blending poetic and visual inquiry is an ideal way to capture "that tension between unity and difference" (p. 104). Poetry, she says, "invites interpretation, multiple meanings, and the chance for readers to locate themselves within a piece, even if they have not shared the experience under examination" (Bucca, 2023, p. 105). In this way, poetic inquiry offers a means of communicating across difference.

While the examples so far have featured researchers leveraging the autoethnographic affordances of poetic inquiry to challenge assumptions about non-normative minds and bodies, qualitative researchers also find that poetic inquiry aligns with principles of critical disability studies. For example, Caroline E. M. Hodges, Lee-Ann Fenge, and Wendy Cutts (2014) used poetic inquiry as part of a participatory arts-based research framework for "researching and communicating young people's everyday experiences of disability" (p. 1090). Poetry workshops offered disabled youth a way to tell their stories and interrogate dominant perceptions of disability. Through performance poetry, they engaged public audiences intellectually and emotionally, prompting them to rethink dangerous stereotypes of disability. Based on feedback from disabled people who wrote and performed poetry and from audience members, the research team discovered that poetry "can provide a powerful therapeutic and creative outlet to communicate lived experience of disability" (Hodges et al., 2014, p. 1099), as well as "engage the public on an emotional level, fostering human connection between the poet/performer and the audience, encouraging them to critically reflect on their own attitudes and transgressing stereotypical ways of thinking about disability" (p. 1100).

In a similar vein, researchers involved in the "DiStory: Disability Then and Now" project in Toronto, Canada embraced poetic inquiry as a method of representation and analysis to make visible thoughts and experiences of individuals with intellectual disabilities (Kuri et al., 2022). When COVID lockdown interfered with a face-to-face collaboration among researchers and community

members with intellectual disabilities, Erin Kuri connected with members over the phone in recorded conversations about their "pandemic experiences, thoughts, worries, fears, and hopes" (Kuri et al. 2022). Through a rigorous, collaborative, reflective process, Kuri and her team wrote and revised found poems from phone transcripts, inviting frequent feedback from call participants. Their goal was to "holistically represen[t]" lived experience, "preserve and evoke affect," inspire empathy, and spark meaningful change. Kuri et al. (2022) offer a series of poems as an embodied documentation of how people with intellectual disabilities live and continue becoming as they "resist social abandonment [and] navigate necropolitical ableism" in the context of a global pandemic.

As these examples illustrate, researchers in disability studies committed to cripping traditional methodologies find poetic inquiry a valuable tool in the effort

> to make the world in which we live roomier, not only more transparent and known, but to make space in the imagination, and so in the culture, for the wide and startling variety of rich and fulfilling ways that real people live and love, work and play in this world. (Ferris, as cited in Lau, 2020)

The power of poetry to represent a range of lived experience and imagine alternative futures makes poetic inquiry an enticing option for researchers across a range of fields and orientations committed to cultural critique and social change.

Deep Listening Through Methodological Surrender

Poetic inquiry beckons researchers compelled by the promise of reflexively researching and writing otherwise because it is a vehicle for methodological surrender and deep listening. As I've explained, I was first drawn to poetic inquiry as a practice of methodological surrender at a time when the standards and parameters of more traditional methods didn't feel right for the research I was immersed in, for how I wanted to be and feel as a researcher and writer finding my forward in the midst of a major professional transition. I was entranced by Restaino's (2019) call, captured in the following found poem I crafted from part of the introduction to *Surrender* (pp. 12-13), to lean into feelings and behaviors researchers are often taught to avoid.

For broken methods
    and contradiction
For creativity
    and too much feeling
For blurred genres
    and for doing the work
that scares us.

I understood methodological surrender as a way to practice becoming myself through my work, to allow the process of doing the work to teach me to become a new writer, researcher, human, to pursue work that would "mak[e] me human, over and over again" (Restaino, 2019, p. 13). Poetic inquiry was my means of surrender.

As Restaino (2019) conceptualizes it, surrender is in part a letting go—of control, of certainty, of what we think we know about ourselves, our practices, each other the world. It means leaning into to queer epistemologies that embrace "the unknowable" (Rhodes, 2015) and accepting the vulnerability that comes with "getting lost" (Lather, 2007) in pursuit of ethical approaches to research and writing that overwhelms and "undoes us" (Restaino, 2019, p. 74). I felt drawn to exploring these ways of being with and in my research and found myself searching for ways to engage.

John Keats' theory of negative capability links poetry to the act of surrender. In letters to relatives contemplating craft, Keats marveled at the capacity of great thinkers and poets to sit with "uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts" without desperately "reaching after fact & reason" (Keats as cited in Poetry Foundation, n.d., *Selections*). The theory suggests that poets have a unique power to surrender, "to bury self-consciousness, dwell in a state of openness to all experience, and identify with the object contemplated" (Poetry Foundation, n.d., *Negative Capability*). That capacity, poet Mary Oliver (1994) explains, is vital for "transfer[ing] from the page to the reader an absolutely essential quality of real feeling" (p. 84). "Only by remaining … negative, or in some way empty," Oliver elaborates, "is the poet able to fill himself [sic] with an understanding of, or sympathy for, or empathy with, the subject of his [sic] poem" (pp. 80-83). Sheila Black, poet and co-editor of the anthology *Beauty Is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability* emphasizes the value and risk in dwelling in such a state of emptiness when she identifies disability poetics as a poetics of negative capability—"an upheaval, a defamiliarization, an ability to remain open … a poetry of vulnerability" (Wagner, 2019). These poets attest to the value of holding negative or empty space for the unknown and unknowable; poetry welcomes a vulnerable willingness to be filled with something new.

Poetic inquiry, then, is a promising method of surrender because poetry is never about knowing once and for all, but giving in to winding recursive contemplation, intuitively feeling along, opening oneself to the essentiality of feeling. Poetic inquiry offers me a way to inhabit the paradoxical knot of promise, possibility, uncertainty and doubt at the heart of methodological surrender in a way that attunes me to my decisions and responsibilities as I grope my way forward. It feels risky because I am not a poet and in fact tend to struggle to acknowledge or claim my creative potential. It feels like giving over, laying bare; it feels like surrender.

Importantly, the surrender poetic inquiry makes possible is not a state of submission rooted in detachment or relinquishing of responsibility but one of hyper-awareness rooted in relationality and accountability. Drawing on psychoanalytic feminist theorist Jessica Benjamin, Restaino (2019) describes surrender in terms of intersubjectivity, the "tension between interacting individuals" (as cited

on p. 45) that resists "push-me-pull-you, doer-done to dynamics" and "'either/or' reductive binar[ies]" (as cited on p. 46) in favor of following "emerging if unfamiliar rhythm[s]" (p. 46). What happens, Restaino asks, when researchers surrender into a process, allowing this kind of intersubjective endeavor to unfold? How does surrender affect who we can become in our work and what effect might our new becomings have on what we can do and know?

Surrender, in this spirit, operates with "rhythmnicity" (Restaino, 2019, p. 49); far from giving up or standing still, it involves continuous movement, "relational exchange, shared motion, a phenomenon of contact and mutual impact after which we are changed in some way" (Restaino, 2019, p. 47). If surrender is a dance, for me, poetic inquiry is the music, the soaring, shifting score that simultaneously invites attunement and lostness, responsiveness to others—researcher participants, readers, human bodies, and bodies of text on the page—and sharpened awareness of my own body and mind. Surrender, like poetry, is "rhythmic, vulnerable, unpredictable, and collaborative" (Restaino, 2019, p. 49). Both involve risk and faith in discoveries to come from following the song where it leads.

As I show below, poetic inquiry entails and inspires this kind of methodological surrender in large part because it facilitates deep listening, at its core a relational, intersubjective practice. In rhetoric and writing studies, the concept of listening is often associated with Krista Ratcliffe's (2005) theory of rhetorical listening, which involves "standing under" the discourses we encounter and letting them "wash over, through, and around us" (p. 28), listening with intent to not only understand others and the cultural contexts they inhabit but to honor the "rhetorical negotiations of understanding as well" (p. 28) and to consider the implications for ourselves and others. As Ratcliffe (2005) explains, rhetorical listening from an "accountability logic" (p. 31) means recognizing the stake we have in one another's lives and well-being; it means reckoning with interlocking forces of privilege and oppression, acknowledging how we are culturally implicated in past events, and behaving in ways that account for the ongoing effects of complicated power dynamics.

Methodological surrender and deep listening as a research practice are mutually sustaining. Both are intentional, ongoing, and active. They are about leaning into relationship and connection. They are about relinquishing control and certainty, letting go of traditional measures of success and how things have always been done in order to awaken new senses, new questions and curiosities, new ways of seeing and moving in relation toward mutual accountability. Both practices humbly engage difference by honoring reflexive intuition, vulnerable responsiveness, and attunement to self and other. Poetic inquiry can facilitate surrender and the deep listening praxis so many researchers value and crave, yet it remains an underexplored research tool toward this end, especially in writing studies.

From graduate students learning methodological traditions and experimenting with approaches to dissertation research to midcareer faculty like myself longing to ignite new passions and forge new relationships with research and

writing, researchers willing to surrender to process and commit to "be transforming" (Oleksiak, 2020b) through deep listening, will find promise in poetic inquiry. In the following section, I emphasize the promise of poetic inquiry for engaging unique challenges and opportunities at the heart of writing research.

Poetic Inquiry and Writing Research

Poetic inquiry offers wholistic, humanistic ways of understanding writers and writing development (our own and others'), dimensions that are not always surfaced through quantitative or even traditional qualitative approaches. Because writing is such a complex, multidimensional activity (Bazerman, 2018; Bazerman et al. 2017) "caught up in all facets of our lives" (Dippre & Phillips, 2020, p. 4), tracing and representing the "rambling pathways" of writer development (Dippre, 2019, as cited in Dippre & Phillips, 2020, p. 3) can be a complicated, daunting endeavor. Providing a unique "porthole to … experience" (Leavy, 2020, p. 98), poetic inquiry offers an artistic, embodied, relational way "to attend to all this complexity" (Dippre & Phillips, 2020, p. 4) and (re)center human elements in the study of writers and writer development. Poems have the potential to capture the rich nuances of writing lives, to reveal what researchers might never access otherwise. In the words of Laurel Richardson, foremother of poetic inquiry in sociology: "a part of humanity that may elude the social scientist reveals itself in poetry" (Richardson, 1997, as cited in Leavy, 2020, p. 98).

Attending to the complexity of voice and research relationships, poetic inquiry is ideal for writing researchers committed to amplifying subjugated voices with critical awareness (Hatton, 1998; Leavy, 2020; Norum, 2000; Poindexter, 2002; Smith, 1999). Poetry has the power to make visible lived experiences that might otherwise be hidden or dismissed, to reveal damaging effects of dominant systems and structures on the material realities of writers, and to support calls to action by contributing to "a developing body of evidence" that is not objective and distanced but intimate and compelling (Galvin & Prendergast, 2016, p. xv). Writing researchers might use poetic inquiry to pursue transformation in policies and procedures that serve some writers more than others. For example, research poems showing how university responses to the COVID pandemic impacted the (writing) lives of women, caregivers, and BIPOC scholars could be used to persuasively "critique power structures, offer alternative views, and advocate for social justice" (Faulker, 2019, p. xii). Moreover, as writers ourselves, writing researchers might use poetic inquiry to attend to our embodied presence in our research, how we develop as writers and humans in response to dynamic forces, including our research with and for writers. Writing researchers grappling with the following questions might find poetic inquiry to be a promising approach:

- How do I make visible the "human" in human subjects research?
- How can I more fully honor the nuance of participants' lived experience?

- How do I stay accountable to those experiences traditional research tools are most likely to miss or flatten?
- How might I orient to my work not as an objective analyst, but as a "vulnerable observer" immersed in the process (Behar, 1996)?
- How do I acknowledge my entanglement with dominant ideologies and (re)orient to my work in the spirit of knowing, being, and doing differently?
- How can my research directly challenge and begin to transform structures and systems that privilege certain bodyminds (Price, 2015) over others?
- How can I honor and draw forth my work from the rich historical roots of theories of the flesh, forged by women of color to theorize from physical realities and embodied experience?
- How can I center relationships (with scholars/scholarship, research participants, self and readers) as both the foundation and goal for my research and writing?

Despite the promise of poetic inquiry, few writing studies scholars publicly claim it as part of their research methodology. A noteworthy exception, writing researcher Collie Fulford (2025) composes poetry as a practice of close listening, a way to enact reciprocity, and an analytical process-product. She uses poetic inquiry as one approach among others for analyzing qualitative data from her study of the writing lives of adult students at an Historically Black University. Creating found poems from interview transcripts, she says, "allows a level of intimacy with another person's way of expressing ideas," attending to "meaning, rhythm and syntax" in an attempt "to distill what is already there" (C. Fulford, personal communication, Nov. 17, 2021). More than member checking, sharing poems with participants, their words echoed back in an aesthetically creative form, becomes an act of reciprocity and mutual vulnerability. "It's evidence I was listening," Fulford explains, "and I found their words both meaningful and *beautiful*. We don't talk about aesthetics or pleasure much in composition research," she continues, "yet there they are" (C. Fulford, personal communication, Nov. 17, 2021).

Participants react with surprise and pleasure when they read their words in Fulford's poems, which is how Fulford often feels when finding/making them. Fulford decided not to include research poems in her book (2025) but poetry writing was still a crucial part of her process. As Faulkner (2020) notes, not all research poetry needs to be featured in analysis or even published. "Harnessing the power of poetry" behind the scenes, so to speak, can be a valuable way "to center creativity in the research process" (p. 155), and a good place to start for writing researchers looking to integrate poetic inquiry into their research and writing.

Researching Faculty Writers

When I began my study of faculty writers in spring 2016, I didn't have poetic inquiry in mind. I was finishing up the book required for tenure at my institution

and beginning to wonder what was next. For that book (Tarabochia, 2017), I interviewed and recorded meetings between writing specialists and faculty in other disciplines working together to develop disciplinary writing pedagogy and curriculum in order to understand how they negotiated expertise and worked across difference to accomplish their goals. When I interviewed faculty about teaching writing, they almost always wanted to talk about their own joyful, traumatic, fulfilling, fraught experiences as writers. I wanted to know more about their lived experience as writers and hoped any insights I discovered could inform growing efforts to better support and retain faculty writers. I recruited my first set of participants from a faculty writing group facilitated by the Writing Center Director and Vice Provost for Faculty at my institution. Participants agreed to annual interviews for up to six years during which we'd talk about their writing lives.

Over the next several years, I recruited additional participants at my institution and two other universities. Faculty joined and left the study over time. Some changed universities, others left academia. In all, I talked to 31 faculty writers at least once, and I talked to 20 of those writers between five and nine times. Twenty-five writers identified as female, and six identified as male. Writers identified as white/ Caucasian (22), Black (2), mixed race/Hispanic (1), Latina/Puerto Rican (1), Iranian (1), Asian (1). Three people chose not to identify race/ethnicity. Faculty came from various institutional positions, though most were tenure track with scholarly publication demands. They worked in many disciplines including education, modern language and linguistics, geography and sustainability, social work, history, writing studies, literature, anthropology, visual arts, health and exercise science, library science, and sociology, among others. Although the research poems throughout the book don't necessarily include words from every participant, my relationship and conversations with each person informed my poetic sensemaking and inquiry process.

My approach to our annual interviews was broadly rooted in Robert Kegan's (1982) constructive-developmental theory of self-evolution, which seeks to shed light on how humans make sense of their experiences and their lives. Loosely following the design protocol described by Lisa Lahey and her colleagues (2011), our interviews began with a self-inventory in which participants jotted down memories or experiences from their writing lives related to 10 words—angry, anxious/ nervous, success, strong stand/conviction, sad, torn, moved/touched, lost something, change, important—and used their notes to guide the interview. According to Lahey et al. (2011), these words are meant direct interviews to "ripe areas" and interviewees to establish "ongoing awareness of themselves" (p. 202).

The protocol engenders data ripe for poetic inquiry. Promoting feminist values of relationality and deep listening, it empowers participants to generate a rich "pool of experiences to select from in the interview" and choose where to focus our attention (Lahey et al. 2011, p. 203). Many faculty writers told me they found the inventory and interview process meaningful for their personal thinking, reflection, and growth. So rarely are they invited to reflect on their writing

lives and revisit experiences about which they carry strong, sometimes unprocessed emotion. My choice to focus on emotion was intentional, particularly in academic contexts that privilege the life of the mind, and aligns with poetic inquiry as an embodied methodology that honors emotional landscapes, bodies and bodily knowledge.

Despite the clear resonance between my approach to interviewing faculty writers and poetic inquiry methodology, I spent years exploring ways to make sense of the data I was gathering before leaning into my poetic practice. I've experimented with ways to analyze interview data and examined various aspects of writer development, including: the relationship between graduate student and faculty writer development (Tarabochia & Madden, 2018), the role of emotional labor in advanced writers' developmental trajectories (Madden & Tarabochia, 2020), how transformative experiences inform learning transfer for faculty (Tarabochia & Heddy, 2019), how self-authorship works as a lens for understanding and supporting faculty writer development (Tarabochia, 2020), and the use of secondary qualitative data analysis for researching writing development (Madden & Tarabochia, 2021). My consistent engagement with the data, my extended relationship with participants, and my deep reflection on my own experiences as a faculty writer throughout the evolution of the project prepared me to embrace (and share) the poetic inquiry process illustrated in this book.

Writing Good (Enough) Poetry: Evaluating Research Poems and Researcher-Poets

Concerns about how poetic inquiry should be employed and evaluated and by whom are frequently voiced by critics, researchers, and poets. Poetic inquiry has been "the subject of premature dismissal by some and intense scrutiny by others, perhaps in part due to misconceptions that it's easy or lacks rigor" (Leavy, 2020, p. 102). My experience corroborates Leavy's (2020) contention that "use of poetry in research increases rigor in the interpretation and writing process; it does not diminish it" (p. 103). As Anne Sullivan (2004) explains "engagement with craft slows us down, brings us into a new kind of attention to the data before us" (p. 35). Deciding how to enact poetic techniques requires researchers to attend to "subtle relations among elements" discovering nuances "not initially perceived, precisely because they are subtle, elusive, encoded" (p. 35). Our colleagues in creative writing can attest to the rigor of craft. Although writing studies and creative writing are often treated as distinct areas in English departments, we of course have much in common. Patricia Sullivan (2012) notes vigorous calls particularly in the 1990s from scholars such as Wendy Bishop, Katherine Haake, and Lynn Bloom to think more intentionally about the relationship between creative writing and composition, and a Creative Writing SIG continues to be active at CCCC. Not surprisingly, creative writers and researchers have long been doing poetic

inquiry, conducting investigations and explorations *through* creative and critical practice (Creative Writing Studies Organization, 2019), with intention and rigor. Writing studies researchers, particularly those of us who come to poetic inquiry without explicit training in creative writing, have much to learn from our colleagues who have built careers in writing, publishing, and teaching poetry. At the same time, questions arise about the standards to which poetry should be held when written in the process of poetic inquiry as an arts-based, qualitative-research methodology. Is there value in imperfect poetic practice?

Energetic debates over rigor and standards fuel the reluctance of many would-be researcher-poets, exacerbating feelings of doubt like the ones expressed in my poem below, written one fall evening after ruminating about my worthiness as a poetic inquirer while snuggling my son to sleep.

Bedtime Ruminations

And if I'm not
a poet . . .
And if I fail . . .
to materialize, concretize,
crystalize, constellate?
What then?
Will it have been worth it?

Questions like these are vital: What counts as a successful poem in the context of poetic inquiry? What credentials, experiences and expertise are required to write "good" research poems? Some arts-based researchers (Piirto, 2009; Prendergast, 2009), advocate for clear standards for arts-based research, including research poems, out of "respect for the domain" and "in defense of quality and qualifications of the artists and their arts" (Piirto, 2009, p. 97). Duduzile S. Ndlovu and Heidi van Rooyen (2025) emphasize "the need for rigorous and aesthetic evaluations that meet both scientific and artistic standards" (p. 156). Others, (Bochner, 2000; Clough, 2000) worry that obsession with criteria, ultimately rooted in human values, choices, and often irreconcilable differences, can have a normalizing effect and derail researchers working with "alternative" (Bocher, 2000, p. 267) methods from realizing the full potential of their approaches. Criteria can become a means of "contain[ing] our desire for freedom and experience, a way of limiting our own possibilities and stifling our creative energy" (Bochner, 2000, p. 267). Given that experimental forms are often linked to resistant politics and social and cultural criticism, the conventionalizing effect of criteria can easily "serve a conservative and destructive function" (Bochner, 2000, p. 269; see also Clough, 2000; Sullivan, 2012).

Nevertheless, careful, ongoing consideration of criteria has the potential to sharpen practice, enhance craft, and strengthen the power of a poetic approach.

Addressing the challenge of assessment in composition courses that assign unconventional forms of writing, Patricia Sullivan (2012) suggests flexible ways of discerning value "in the absence of previously established criteria" (p. 15). The "process of revision and invention of new criteria," says Sullivan, means attending to "particularity" as well as reimagining the work of writing and what counts as good (p. 99). In a similar vein, I am compelled by efforts to discern the quality of poetic inquiry and worthiness of poetic inquirers based on the *goals* for incorporating arts-based approaches into qualitative research, goals rooted at least in part in a feminist research agenda committed to "ethical and deep relationships between researchers and participants . . . engender[ing] change and mak[ing] participant lives better, and . . . social justice and equity for all" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 97). Toward similar ends, Ndlovu and van Rooyen (2025) argue that a decolonial approach to poetic inquiry should "include marginalized voices and ensure that research outputs are accessible and meaningful across diverse communities" (p. 156). Arthur Bochner (2000), Kimberly Dark (2009) and Leavy (2020) also focus on audience response as an important measure: Does the research poem offer a moving story felt in the body not just in the head, invite connection, "*fee[l]* truthful (Leavy, 2020, p. 103), enact ethical self-consciousness that "provides a space for the listener's becoming," and inspire action (Bochner, 2000, p. 271)? Goal-related criteria make it possible to both rigorously and flexibly evaluate poetic inquiry.

I am persuaded by arguments for "good enough" poetry as/in qualitative research (Lahman, Richard & Teman, 2019; see also Faulkner, 2025). With Andrew Sparkes (2020), I see a role for non-poets, or researcher-poets, who might produce "not-quite poetry," and "still accomplish their representational task" (p. 44). I believe that "poemish representations" can meaningfully forge a "safe space for creation" (Lahman, Richard & Teman, 2019, p. 215) provided that researchers who don't identify as poets hone our capacity to recognize "occasions" for research poetry (Sullivan, 2009), commit to intentional revision decisions, and do our best to attend to poetic craft (Faulkner, 2020).

In my own exploration of poetic inquiry, I developed various strategies for recognizing occasions for research poetry, as the following chapters will make clear. I believe in the power of revision and sometimes revised research poems after receiving feedback from participants or with aesthetics in mind. However, some poems have been revised very little in part because I find them interesting as relics of a moment of poetic interpretation. This respect for unrevised poems is likely rooted in my time facilitating restorative poetry workshops with incarcerated women as a volunteer for the nonprofit Poetic Justice.[11] Writers in our workshops always had a choice whether to share their poems, to request silent or subtle recognition from fellow workshop members, to invite rigorous response and feedback, and whether to revise their work or not before submitting for

11. See https://www.poeticjustice.org/

publication. I empowered myself to make that decision with research poems in this book as well.

Despite skepticism about whether researcher-poets can be reliable critics of their own work, I agree with Faulkner (2020) that in specifying the goals of a particular work, a researcher can constitute valuable criteria for judging the extent to which the project has achieved those objectives. As with any research methodology, poetic inquiry is a rigorous process that calls for study, practice, peer assessment and ongoing, recursive development. Ndlovu and van Rooyen (2025) offer valuable questions and exercises researchers can use to assess the craft and reach of their poetic inquiry practices and products. Poet-researchers have a responsibility to use these tools and others to hold ourselves accountable to both "the craft of poetry" and "the ethics of research" so as to "enhance the legitimacy and impact of poetic inquiry" (Ndlovu & van Rooyen, 2025, p. 179). I find the process of critical reflection on rigor and critical consideration of a range of possible criteria valuable and motivating as I find my way as a researcher-poet.

Chapter Breakdown

In what follows, I share my journey with poetic inquiry, drawing on qualitative interview data from my study to demonstrate, theorize, and reflect on particular poetic methods of inquiry and to speculate about how they might meet various needs of writing researchers. Each chapter features a set of poetic practices and techniques using my research with faculty writers to illustrate the affordances and challenges. Examples include: *composite poems* (poems created with words of multiple participants from across interviews); *cluster poems* (series of short poems each crafted with words from one individual gathered into a cluster to shed light on an issue or topic—mothering in academia, shame, mental health); *profile poems or I-poems* (extended poems crafted with words from one participant from multiple interviews collected overtime); and *collaborative poetry* (poems crafted from transcripts from one participant written collaboratively with the participant). Each chapter includes a breakdown of the process of creating each type of research poem from qualitative interview data and an analysis of the affordances of the technique along with ideas about when and how other researchers might experiment with the approach.

The first chapter focuses on composite poetry, an approach that combines lines, words or phrases from multiple research participants into one found data poem, highlighting its promise for honoring the complicated relationship between the one and the many—between a unique research participant and the larger group(s) of which they are a part, between individual and collective, personal and shared experiences of a phenomenon under study. Drawing on my research with faculty writers, I show how composite poetry can hold researchers accountable to "multiple and complicated truths" (Faulkner, 2020, p. 7)—in my case, truths about how faculty writers conceptualize, experience and resist the notion of resilience

in their academic writing lives. In doing so, I suggest, composite poetry empowers researchers to disentangle seemingly universal constructs, such as resilience, that drive dominant discourse and assumptions about writing and significantly impact writers' lives. Using resilience as an example, this chapter demonstrates how composite research poetry could be used to mine various phenomena for the purpose of deconstructing stock stories about writers and writer development. The chapter concludes by explaining how composite poetry responds to "occasions" (Sullivan, 2009) in qualitative research that call for poetic rendering and how writing researchers can build the capacity to notice these opportunities.

The second chapter considers the value of poetry clusters—series of poems created from various source texts including interview transcripts, literature and, researcher notes/reflections that engage a particular theme—for mining aspects of writers' lived experience. Centering a poetry cluster called "Write Like a Mother," I model how this approach to poetic inquiry provides writing researchers "a powerful way of expressing a range of subtle nuances about a topic while simultaneously producing a more general overview," a way of conjuring "a richer and deeper [multivocal] understanding of a phenomenon" (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009, p. 4). I model the value of clustering for evoking the "radical specificity" (Sotirin, 2010)—the ungeneralizable intimacy and intensity of sensations, events, emotions and relations—around a shared condition, in my case motherscholaring (Howard et al., 2023). I theorize cluster poems as a practice of constellation (Hidalgo et al., 2021; Schoone, 2020; Wieser-Weryackwe et al., 2023), an alternative to the traditional ways of validating findings in qualitative research through triangulation or crystallization (Richardson, 1997; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Constellating meaning through poetry is a practice of relationality and accountability, worldviews and ways of being central to cultural rhetorics and Indigenous research and writing paradigms (Kovach, 2009; Riley-Mukavetz, 2020; Wilson, 2008).The goal is not to substantiate objective analysis, but to honor "the multiplicitities of orientations" possible, "visibilize a web of relations" (Powell et al., 2014) and robustly represent the messy complexity of writing lives.

The third chapter offers three approaches to poetic inquiry that enact a praxis of deep listening in qualitative research—profile poems, reverse interview poems, and I-poems. Deep listening is a rigorous, recursive, reflexive effort to understand with "greater precision and compassion" the positions, perspectives, stories and experiences of research participants (Rosenberg & Howe, 2018, p. 76; see also Boehr, 2021). Inspired by rounds of listening featured in Carol Gilligan's Listening Guide for qualitative research (as cited in Gilligan et al., 2006), the first two types of poetic inquiry featured in this chapter establish the landscape of a participant's experience (profile poems) and interrogate how the researcher's social locations and reactions shape understandings of participants and their stories (reverse interview poems). The final type of poetry highlighted in this chapter, I-poems, can be used to create space between the participant's and the analyst's perceptions, a pause for listening before interpretation (Edwards & Weller, 2012).

The juxtaposition of my poetic approaches to engaging in deep listening with data from the same research participant highlights how each approach enacts a different type of listening and provides a different "angle of understanding" (Edwards & Weller, 2012, p. 216). It underscores for qualitative researchers the value in using these forms of poetic inquiry to deliberately shift modes of analytic ontology, to move between looking at and standing alongside participants in order to listen more deeply.

The fourth chapter explores a collaborative form of poetic inquiry featuring my work with Julie, a faculty writer who has participated in my study since 2016. Together, we engaged in a process Melanie Burdick (2011) calls "tandem found poetry" (TFP) by which "found poems are created separately but at roughly the same time, from the same text, by the interviewer and the participant" (p. 5). Over the course of a year, Julie and I independently created poems from each of her seven interview transcripts and met regularly to share our creations and reflect on the experience. I documented our recursive process and in this chapter analyze the self-generated data to understand what made the experience so provocative and powerful for us. In doing so, I show how TFP intentionally rejects positivist assumptions and traditional power dynamics of researcher/researched, embracing friendship as method (Tillmann-Healy, 2003) and inviting study participants to collaborate in the determination of what needs saying and how it might best be said (Burdick, 2011). I highlight several gifts TFP offered me and Julie, including healing through multiple truths, (re)tracing hope and joy, honoring versions of lived experience, emphasizing that the nature of new knowledge and understanding will necessarily shift with each iteration. I suggest that TFP, as part of a feminist research praxis, offers writing researchers a means for creatively and collaboratively grappling with questions about perception, truth, and meaning by profoundly and playfully shifting traditional research relationships and outcomes. Finally, I identify essential components of TFP as an inherently responsive, adaptable process.

In the conclusion, I highlight four interlocking dimensions of methodological surrender with/through poetic inquiry: rhetorical, pedagogical, ethical, material. I explain how these dimensions manifested in my own poetic inquiry project, scaffolding new ways of listening and changing the trajectory of my writing, research, and sense of self as a researcher, writer, and human. By highlighting the transformative, subversive potential of poetic inquiry, I hope to ignite the imagination of writing researchers considering experimenting with poetic inquiry.

As the chapters will undoubtedly show, I discovered the promise of poetic inquiry slowly through fits and starts in surprising moments of immersion and delight, and I continue to grope my way forward with and through this method. Based on my experience, I urge writing researchers intrigued by the possibilities of poetic inquiry to take a playful approach; read widely—poetry as well as poetic inquiry scholarship—follow your intuition, and try out the techniques and approaches that beckon you. I hope this book supports and inspires you on your journey.

Chapter 1. Composite Poetry: Relationship Between the One and the Many

Composite poetry is one type of poetic inquiry that has been valuable in my research with faculty writers. As the term *composite* suggests, this approach combines lines, words or phrases from multiple research participants into one found data poem. Composite poems are ideal for highlighting the complex relationship between unique and resonant experiences, between the individual participants and larger groups of which they are a part. With composite poems, writing researchers can mine qualitative data to trouble common assumptions about writer development and success that support some writers more than others. Of the questions poetic inquiry can help writing researchers pursue, composite poetry is well suited to engage the following:

- How do I stay accountable to those experiences traditional research tools are most likely to miss or flatten?
- How do I acknowledge my entanglement with dominant ideologies and (re)orient to my work in the spirit of knowing, being, and doing differently?
- How can my research directly challenge and begin to transform structures and systems that privilege certain bodyminds (Price, 2015) over others?

To illustrate, this chapter features a composite poem I crafted with transcripts from interviews with faculty writers in my study and highlights how this approach to poetic inquiry honors the complex relationships between individual and collective experiences. I show how composite poetry especially leverages the power of poetic inquiry to hold researchers accountable to multiple truths (Faulkner, 2020), revealing and juxtaposing many realities so that we might begin to disentangle seemingly universal constructs around writing that impact writers' lives in complicated ways. I suggest that interrogating normative constructs through composite poetry can inspire new strategies for supporting more diverse trajectories, making the method a promising vehicle for democratizing writing development and pursuing access and equity for writers.

Composite Poetry as a Tool for Interrogating Social Constructs

Composite poetry, artistically combining words and phrases from multiple research participants into one poem, illuminates the relationship between commonalities and divergences in lived experience. In doing so, this approach to poetic inquiry reveals how social constructs that may seem universally applicable may actually

operate differently in material lives shaped by interlocking privilege and oppression to the benefit of some more than others. Michelle Commeyras and Mercy Montsi (2000), for instance, use composite poems to explore gender identity and ideology among Botswanan youth. They juxtapose a poetic representation composed from 25 essays written by young females in Botswana about how life would change if they woke up to find themselves a member of the other sex with a composite data poem composed from 25 essays written by young males in response to the same prompt. The poems depict social constructions of gender identity by "captur[ing] some of the lyricism of the words and phraseology that Batswana youth had used to express themselves" (Commeyras & Montsi, 2000, p. 342). Commeyras and Montsi (2000) report using the research poems in their work on gender issues in education with students in Botswana and teachers in the US where they have sparked profound responses. Considered alongside the researchers' more standard thematic content analysis, the composite poems contribute to efforts to develop pedagogical practices for creating a "gender-literate population" in Botswana able to address tensions between "contemporary lifestyles and a gender ideology with historical roots" (Commeyras & Montsi, 2000, p. 345).

In a different vein, Eric D. Teman (2010) composed from his study of a queer cultural center a composite or collective poem from the words of four participants as they shared feelings about the suicide of an undergraduate student leader of the center during the course of the study. The poem was not designed to do analytical work like Commeyras and Montsi's (2000) composite poetry. Yet even as a stand-alone artifact the research poem compellingly captures participants' feelings about suicide in the gay community, shedding light on suicide as a social construct. As these examples show, composite poems offer more dynamic and multifaceted views of phenomena of interest than do poems created from words of single individuals. Resonant with portraiture as a genre of inquiry, composite poetry "capture[s] the texture and nuance of human experience" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 5) in ways that recognize and celebrate the individual even as it blurs the "boundaries between individual and humankind" (p. 21). In doing so, it can usefully trouble dominant social constructs that are always more complicated than they seem.

The versatility of composite found poems for surfacing similarities and differences among individuals and groups within a set of research participants make it valuable for studying constructs related to multidimensional and fraught phenomena. As Alison Happel-Parkins and Katharina A. Azim (2017) illustrate in their "interruptive narratives of pregnancy and childbirth," because composite poetry "underscores the impossibility of (re)presenting a/the Truth" of an experience, it "allow[s] researchers to work with transgressive data that is often ignored in more traditional analyses." Composite poetry offers a way to examine complicated, transgressive "truths" by "tell[ing] it slant," to paraphrase a line from Emily Dickinson's famous poem. In their book *Tell It Slant: Writing and Shaping Creative Nonfiction*, Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola (2005) interpret Dickinson

to be acknowledging that "truth takes on many guises" (p. viii); truth depicted through art is both deeply rooted in and distinct from the truth of daily life. By capturing the dynamic relationship between the one and the many when it comes to lived experience, composite poetry artistically represents realities of daily life, working within and across complex layers of multiple truths. It invites researchers and readers to interrogate the paradoxical elements of social constructs that mean differently as they move across discursive, ideological, and material spaces.

I turned to composite poetry as a way to engage with a particular construct that emerged in my interviews with faculty writers: resilience. Resilience is just one example of a construct writing researchers could interrogate through composite poetry. A study of graduate writers, for example, might use composite poetry to examine the relationship between individual and collective experiences of imposter syndrome to show how that construct circulates in academic discourse and impacts the lived realities of graduate writers. A study of workplace writers might feature composite poems crafted from interviews with new employees of an organization to investigate how productivity operates as a construct circulating through company discourse and shaping the workers' writing identities and development. By demonstrating how I used composite poetry to analyze and recast social constructions of resilience and the role it can play in faculty writers' lives, I hope to inspire writing researchers to imagine ways to use this type of poetic inquiry to examine relevant constructs in their own research contexts.

In what follows, I explain how resilience emerged as a theme in my data and how I identified it as a construct worth interrogating based on how resilience is discussed (or not) in published scholarship. I then illustrate how I used composite poetry to study and critically recast the construct of resilience in the context of faculty writing lives and offer suggestions about how researchers might identify occasions for composite poetry in their own work.

Resilience as a Theme in Interviews with Faculty Writers

I became interested in exploring the concept of resilience upon reading a round of interview transcripts and noticing experiences of adversity that faculty writers shared hesitantly with me and seemed compelled to keep hidden from others (i.e. evaluators and peers) for fear of judgement. Each writer's experiences were striking and distinct but also resonant with the experiences of other writers in the study, related if not exactly shared. Exploring how faculty responded to the adversity they experienced seemed vital in the context of academic ideologies such as "publish or perish" and "survival of the fittest" that make faculty believe any setback or struggle is a sign of personal failure or "not enoughness" (as one participant in my study put it). As I read and re-read transcripts, I saw the concept of resilience emerge in response to adversity in complex ways. Faculty wrestled with the message that they should appear resilient, show resiliency, no matter the adversity they faced and no matter the cost of performing resilience. It became

clear that although experiences of adversity created opportunities for resilience, all were not equal in terms of stakes and consequences.

Intrigued by the emergent theme of resilience, I gathered definitions from ecology, psychiatry, and psychology. Resilience, I discovered, is often understood as the capacity (of a system or individual) to "absorb disturbance" (Walker & Salt, 2006, p. xiii), to "bounce back after encountering difficulty" (Southwick & Charney, 2018, p. 8), to adapt to stressful situations (Palmiter et al., 2020), to demonstrate "hardiness" (Kobasa & Puccetti, 1983, as cited in Jordan, 2004, p. 29). In this view, resilience is a valuable mechanism for sustaining a person or a system; it is an uncontested good. However, scholars problematized the notion of resilience from a range of perspectives, including education (Gallagher et al., 2019; McMahon, 2007), race (Bachay & Cingel, 1999; Griffin, 2016), queer studies (Cover, 2016; I. Meyer, 2015), disability studies (Hutcheon & Lashewicz, 2015) Indigenous studies (Reid, 2019), and feminist studies (Bracke, 2016; Flynn et al., 2012a; McMahon, 2007). For example, as Fulford laments, resilience is often associated with "individual persistence" and grit (Fulford, 2019, p. 231), neglecting "relationality and mutuality as constitutive dynamics of resilience" (Flynn et al., 2012b, p. 5). Treating resilience as a personal trait obscures systemic forces that demand resilience from some more than others.

Resilience can also be problematic when it is indexed to the status quo (Lerner, 2019). The goal of resilience is typically to return to "normal" after a challenge or disturbance, but when "normal" constitutes a state of oppression, the aim of returning to rather than transforming original conditions becomes questionable. As Sarah Bracke (2016) points out in her feminist critique, traditional forms of resilience can actually limit the capacity to imagine and pursue transformation because it depends on the very "dispossession it seeks to overcome" (p. 63). Thus while valuing and encouraging resilience may seem like an accepted moral good, uncritical pursuit and demand for resilience, particularly in the context of institutions like higher education, can thwart equity and access.

I began to wonder if and how resilience might be a complicated and potentially problematic construct for faculty writers, perhaps insidiously shaping their perceptions of self and their struggle to build sustainable writing lives. The concept of resilience clearly circulated around them as part of the discourse of faculty success, particularly for writers required to publish for tenure or career mobility. At the same time, resilience seemed to be understudied as a discursive force or experiential phenomenon in the lives of faculty writers. Scholarship on resilience in higher education tends to focus on undergraduates (Gallagher et al., 2019), and few scholars consider resilience in the context of faculty success (e.g., Cora-Bramble, 2006; Cora-Bramble et al., 2010). Resilience is not a featured concept in studies of faculty *writers*; the term does not appear in the indexes of recent publications (Ezer, 2016; Geller & Eodice, 2013; Sword, 2017; Tulley, 2018). I sensed that investigating resilience as a construct with multiple, shifting meanings and ways of circulating discursively could shed new light on the lived experience of faculty writers and inform more nuanced faculty support efforts.

In the rest of the chapter, I demonstrate how I used composite poetry to interrogate the construct of resilience in the lives of faculty writers. In so doing, I don't mean to forward an argument about resilience per se (although I am fascinated by the many and evolving insights about resilience in faculty writing lives my composite poem surfaces), nor do I mean to suggest that other researchers should use composite poetry to study resilience (although they certainly could). Rather, my goal is to play out one example of how composite poetry is useful for probing and even recasting social constructs germane to writers and writing. I invite writing researchers to consider how composite poetry might work in their own research contexts, with different research populations, and different social constructs relevant to understanding hidden dimensions of writers' lived experiences.

Composing Composite Poetry: An Example

To craft the composite poem featured in this chapter, I used an intuitive, non-linear process similar to that of educational researchers Lynn Butler-Kisber (2002) and Susan Walsh (2006) that involved several rounds of selecting, paring down, deleting, rearranging lines, building a "mental kaleidoscope" as words from one participant conjured aspects of other participants' experiences until the accumulation surfaced and made "more tangible" various dimensions of the subject under investigation: resilience (Butler-Kisber, 2002, p. 233). This particular poem was created from a subset of data, interviews with 21 participants in spring 2018.[12] Participants come from three different institutions, all wanted or needed to write for publication, and most were initially recruited from facilitated faculty writing groups. Most were tenure track or recently tenured in 2018. They associated with several field areas and disciplines, though mostly the social science and the arts and humanities. Most self-identified as white women, one woman identified as Black, one man as Iranian, one man as mixed race and three people chose not to specify race or ethnicity. The poem does not necessarily include words from all 21 participants, but engaging with all of the transcripts informed the process of creating composite poetry.

As I read transcripts, I kept a file with sentences and phrases that struck me as I read. Because I was interested in exploring resilience, I paid particular attention to lines that captured adversity or faculty responses to adversity. I whittled down the file to the most poignant or impactful lines, the ones that provoked a bodily reaction in me and those that captured the essence of what I'd heard from other participants. Next, I grouped the lines that spoke to each other and chose lines to

12. There is nothing special about this group of participants or this moment in time. As I prepared to conduct interviews in 2019, listening to audio recordings of interviews and reviewing transcripts from 2018, I became curious about resilience and what I could learn about faculty writers' perceptions of and experiences with resilience by listening differently to the data in front of me.

title those groups. Finally, I arranged the lines within each group into stanzas to address different aspects of the topic or communicate a feeling.

In Butler-Kisber's (2002) words, "there is no question that this found poem is my interpretation" (p. 234) of what I heard in participants' stories based on what "resonated with my—and what I imagined were other [faculty writers']—experiences" (p. 232). Although data poems can be created for a variety of purposes in the process of poetic inquiry, including reflection and analysis behind the scenes, so to speak, this poem was crafted to be shared. In fact, at the 2019 Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference, I invited session attendees to perform a collaborative reading of this poem. Their unsolicited comments about how deeply, and in some cases disturbingly, the words and sentiments resonated with them as writers attest to the features of composite poetry that make it resonant with potential audiences—verisimilitude, narrative truth(s), and evocation (Fernández-Giménez et al., 2019; Leavy, 2018).

Participants whose words appear in the poem also had a chance to read and respond to a draft of this chapter. All who responded were supportive of the methodology. Some were particularly moved by how other writers' experiences resonated with their own and struck by the feeling of not always knowing which words were theirs, again highlighting the significance of composite poetry's capacity for representing the complex relationship between one and many. After sharing my composite poem, I elaborate on the main affordance of this approach to poetic inquiry—untangling complicated constructs such as resilience. In doing so, I invite readers to consider how collective and individual experiences of writers, and how normative discourses or assumptions about writers in diverse research contexts, might be meaningfully engaged, resisted and (perhaps) transformed through composite poetry.

Adversity and Resilience in Faculty Writing Lives: A Found Poem

1 All sorts of ways of telling a story,
Find the rhythm.

2 Get told: Okay, here's the path, go down the path.
Over and over and over
Over and over and over again.
Such a torture!

3 You have to imagine Sisyphus is happy.

Failing Better

4 Anxious. Nervous.
Always
Always

Always
Always the question:
Will the words come?

5 Writing is what makes the pressure
of writing go away.

6 It shouldn't be that hard, but it is for me.
A constant battle:
You can do this.
You can't do this.
The good and the evil.

7 The demon has quieted.

8 I'm nervous in the chair.
Other people can do it, why can't I?
Get stuck in feeling bad--
Why are you doing this, you're such a fake?
It's terrifying to feel that anxious.

Just keep my head above water,
surrendering to the fact that I'm not okay.

9 I'm more comfortable in the struggle.

It's the Losses that Stick

10 Writing is such an alone thing,
in-between kind of purgatory position.
You don't really have a choice, do this or fail.
I didn't do it right,
I should have done it better.
I disappointed you.
I let you down.
I, I, I, I, sad, personal stuff.

11 I'm going to fail trying.

12 Waste of my talent,
waste of years and relationships,
letting down my family.

It'd be catastrophic.
Don't know if I can think of anything worse,
besides severe disability or death.

13 Tenure has removed a lot of those shackles.

14 Life? That's a whole other story.
To live my life and work
but not have work erode that life.
I lost the chance to make that choice.
Do people have to suffer
to live the quality of life they want to lead?

My books aren't going to come visit me when I'm old.

15 Learning to do life better.

I Want Poetry, I Want a Poetics

16 Time to go on this archeological expedition
and find the thing that I want to be.
Try to put your round peg into that square hole.
That's just not how I am.
Creative juices don't flow that way.
Just need to suffer through it.

Everything is fine,
except when it's not.

17 Just let it be.

18 Other people's expectations:
Good people are people who work hard.
I don't want to be that person
checking the boxes.
Am I being prideful?
Am I too invested in praise and recognition?
Get the fuck over yourself.
You're not special.

19 Y'all can kiss it. I could care less
what y'all care about.

20 Work is where I lose my sense of self,
not where I get my sense of self.
It was such a clear omission,
like I didn't even exist.
There's a thing there that I'm chasing
that I can't quite get to.

21 I feel in my bones that the work is important.

Our Labor is Our Labor

22 Being pulled apart
there just aren't enough parts of me.

Like the ameba that's splitting in half,
this physiological connection in my mind
around writing.

23 Start dislodging the association
between anxiety and writing.

24 Physical and mental torment.
Bargain with yourself,
what you're willing to accept.
I wake up hot, sweaty.
It's awful,
like being smashed down
but with no way out.

25 It comes down to support.

26 Emotionally exhausted and depressed,
incredible sense of sorrow and guilt,
heartbrokenness for the subject matter.
Couldn't talk myself out of the way that felt.
Went home and cried,
several times,
by myself.

27 Just walk along with me.

28 So I'm just fucking doing it—

Sewing together my parachute
with the writing.
Like the falcon rising from the dust.

29 How are you gonna start the revolution if
you're not writing?

Mining Composite Poetry: Resilience in the Lives of Faculty Writers

To highlight the transferrable value of composite poetry as a particular approach to poetic inquiry that can illuminate the complexity of writing-related constructs, I mine my composite poem for insights about how the construct of resilience operates in the lives of faculty writers. By revealing multiple truths in a collective voice, my composite poem honors affective, material experiences of faculty writers, ones that often remain hidden in an academic culture that separates mind/body/emotion, privileges independence, and favors linear narratives of success. The poetic representation invites a visceral association with embodied feelings of perpetual torment, anxiety, self-criticism and doubt, loss, longing, exhaustion, and persistence that plague many faculty writing lives. The composite nature of the poem generates insights that might not have emerged from the storied experience of any single participant alone. Taken together, those insights suggest a re/conceptualization of the construct of resilience that challenges bootstrap ideologies and truisms about self-sufficiency that dominate academic discourse around faculty success. A new vision emerges in which

- Resilience is constructed: Resilience looks, feels, and means differently, has different implications, depending on the context and the type of adversity that demands it.
- Resilience is nonlinear: Far from a steady march through adversity to success, resilience is more likely to be a messy, recursive mangle of starts, stops, and perpetual returns.
- Resilience is discursive: Discourses of resilience shape how faculty writers understand their struggles and experiences in ways that enable and constrain their work.

In what follows, I elaborate on the vision of resilience revealed through my composite poem in order to illustrate the value of this approach to poetic inquiry for de/reconstructing dominant ideologies that affect writers' lived realities, including access to resources and support and likelihood of thriving in the context of systems and structures designed to sustain some more than others. Of course the process of creating composite research poetry isn't just valuable for interrogating resilience; it also can be used to mine various constructs for the purpose of troubling stock

stories about writers and writer development. My hope is that in considering the kinds of insights I gleaned, researchers will feel inspired to imagine how composite poetry might generate insights in their own contexts by unraveling problematic constructs and ideologies around writers/writing.

Resilience is Constructed

By featuring "all sorts of ways of telling the story" (stanza 1, line 1), composite poems reveal that dominant ideologies about writers and writer development, assumptions rooted in evaluative systems of belief that guide behavior, are constructed rather than inherent. By surfacing numerous, sometimes paradoxical constructions, composite poems challenge stock stories and truisms. Because poetry honors and evokes emotion, readers *feel* multiple truths around how writers experience their writing lives. For example, because resilience depends on adversity, dynamically representing multiple descriptions of the lived experience of adversity in the foregoing composite poem troubles perceptions of resilience as a moral good, acknowledging how certain experiences and consequences of resilience are more meaningful than others. To be sure, adversity can be necessary and worth enduring. The struggle to figure out what one wants to say or be—how one works as a writer (stanza 16)—is essential for building a healthy writing life, in which case resilience can be an empowering self-investment. On the contrary, needless adversity demands resilience that is discriminatory and dehumanizing—writers describe "Physical and mental torment" (stanza 24, line 1), "…splitting in half," (stanza 22, line 3), "Being pulled apart" (stanza 22, line 1). The demand to advocate for one's right to exist (stanza 20), being "Emotionally exhausted…" (stanza 26, line 1), filled with "heartbrokenness…" (stanza 26, line 3) and suffering in solitude (stanza 26)—often the result of fighting to survive in sexist, racist, classist, ableist, colonialist institutions—are not only without benefit but also demeaning. In such a diminished state, individuals and groups are distracted from and ill equipped to transform dominant ideologies that create and sustain senseless adversity in the first place.

Spotlighting varying truths is important because too often expectations about what successful, productive writers look and act like are treated as universal when they are actually constructed and sanctioned through dominant ideologies (Hutcheon & Lashewicz, 2015). In my example resilience seems to be determined by how well individuals fulfill institutionally valued roles; those who deviate from or resist those roles may be considered less resilient. Academics often cling to "understandings of resilience that reflect the dominant cultural ethos of the rugged individual and that tout resilient individuals as possessing above-average levels of fortitude or character-armor" (Hutcheon & Lashewick, 2014, p. 1388), and thus identify resilient writers as those who are stoic and independent, who seem "together," confident, who don't need help. Processes such as "mourning, distress, suffering, anxiety, vulnerability, or uncertainty" are attributed to "less-than resilient" individuals and groups (Hutcheon & Lashewicz, 2015, p. 44). In

this view, lines in the poem such as "It comes down to support" (stanza 25, line 1) and "Just walk along with me" (stanza 27, line 1) suggest writers are unprepared or, as one writer in my study heard from her senior colleagues, in need of inappropriate "handholding." Admission of extreme anxiety—"I'm nervous in the chair" (stanza 8, line 1), "It's terrifying to feel that anxious" (stanza 8, line 5) —devastating doubt—"Will the words come?" (stanza 4, line 6)—and tortuous guilt—"I didn't do it right/I should have done it better/I disappointed you/I let you down" (stanza 10, lines 4-7), "waste of years and relationships,/letting down my family" (stanza 12, lines 2-3)—might likewise indicate lack of resilience.

In their study of resilience in families with members with disabilities, community health researchers Emily J. Hutcheon and Bonnie Lashewicz (2015), argue for more nuanced understandings of resilience, questioning existing scholarship "predicated on…prescriptive assumptions" about what constitutes a resilient family. In a similar vein, my composite poem resists traditional definitions of resilience. When expressions of vulnerability, anxiety, and struggle emerge from the collective, as in the poem, they become more than unfortunate flaws and failures of a select few and begin to trouble assumptions about what constitutes resilience in the first place. What if, the poem asks, writers who "focus on stressors and burdens" and don't always ascribe "positive meaning" (Hutcheon & Lashewicz, 2015, p. 44) could still be demonstrating resilience? The lines "Just keep my head above water/surrendering to the fact that I'm not okay" (stanza 8, lines 6-7), for example, might initially suggest floundering, drowning, giving up. However, surrendering could also be an empowering release of denial, a refusal to waste energy treading water in order to appear resilient, the first step to making changes in structures or practices that are not sustainable. Like the families in Hutcheon and Lashewicz's (2015) research, my poem shows how faculty "navigate successes and challenges" in ways that are not always "expected, or even imagined, under prevailing definitions of resilience" (p. 42).

Resilience is Nonlinear

Prevailing constructions frame resilience as a linear progression in which individuals weather adversity, emerging worn and scarred but triumphant. In composite poems, literary strategies are used to crack the smooth surface of normative constructions. In this case, repetition troubles the linearity of resilience by forcing readers to linger with faculty in the grueling reiteration of relentless adversity. Writers don't always see (let alone reach) the finish line. As my composite poem reveals, they endure the torture of going "…down the path./Over and over and over/Over and over and over again" (stanza 2, lines 1-3), eternally chasing a thing they "…can't quite get to" (stanza 20, line 6). The terrible possibility that the words will never come is "Always/Always/Always" (stanza 4, lines 2-4) a reality as faculty experience high stakes writing for publication as an "in-between kind of purgatory position" (stanza 10, line 2). Poetic techniques create an interpretive

representation of faculty writers' individual and collective experience. The composite nature of the poem makes it impossible to rationalize that the few who get stuck or stalled in the quicksand of adversity are personally delinquent, unusually flawed, somehow responsible for the failure of resilience to overcome hardship once and for all. Composite poetry reveals this underacknowledged aspect of resilience; few actually experience it as consistent forward momentum.

Even as many lines of the poem emphasize the relentlessness of adversity, others indicate hope—writers "…imagine Sisyphus is happy" (stanza 3, line 1), notice "the demon has quieted" (stanza 7, line 1); they demonstrate earned insight—"Writing is what makes the pressure/of writing go away" (stanza 5, lines 1-2), and become "…more comfortable in the struggle" (stanza 9, line 1); they demonstrate dogged determination—"I'm going to fail trying" (stanza 11, line 1). Importantly I did not gather these lines at the end of the poem as final statements of resilient fortitude in the face of adversity. Rather, I placed them to run alongside writers' experiences of wallowing in the muck and mire, refrains that respond to but do not resolve the agony expressed in the verses running down the left side of the page. In this way, the poem highlights a recursive relationship between adversity and resilience. Resilience is not necessarily a solution or even a response to adversity, as linear constructions would suggest. Instead, writers hold these forces simultaneously in tension. The composite poetic form allows this seeming paradox to emerge, as the literary/rhetorical technique of call and response contrasts writers' experiences of perpetual adversity with sentiments of grit.

I regularly followed lines that suggest resilience with lines that reiterate ongoing clashes with adversity, resisting the notion of resilience as a happy ending. In the poem, writers describe "…a constant battle" (stanza 6, line 2) of good and evil: "You can do this./ You can't do this" (stanza 6, lines 3-4). They struggle to the point of exhaustion to "…keep… head above water" (stanza 8, line 6), and they "Get stuck in feeling bad" (stanza 8, line 3) as they ponder why others appear more resilient than they feel. Writers fail to take an optimistic view or convince themselves to stay positive; they sit "…exhausted…" (stanza 26, line 1) and full of "…sorrow…"(stanza 26, line 2) and "…heartbrokenness" (stanza 26, line 3). Writers doubt whether the goal is worth the effort to be resilient in the face of such anguish. They wonder, "Do people have to suffer/to live the quality of life they want to lead?" (stanza 14, lines 5-6) and question what it is all for: "My books aren't going to come visit me when I'm old" (stanza 14, line 7). By circling through adversity and resilience, the movement of the poem resists linearity and invites readers to reconsider the relationship between those forces and the agency they have in traversing them. Composite poetry illustrates how faculty writers "navigate, in a multitude of ways, the interface between the positive and the negative aspects of their experiences" (Hutcheon & Lashewicz, 2015, p. 57), allowing "narratives of unevenness, paradox, and contradiction" (Hutcheon & Lashewicz, 2015, p. 56) to emerge in ways that challenge traditional, one-dimensional notions of resilience. Depending on the dominant construct at play, intentional use of particular literary techniques within

the framework of composite poetry to juxtapose the one and the many can bring into question previously taken-for-granted dimensions and create opportunities for critical transformation of the constructs themselves.

Resilience is Discursive

Finally, composite poems expose, in nuanced ways, how dominant constructs and ideologies shape and are shaped by the discourses surrounding the lives and work of writers. The composite poem shared in this chapter suggests that sometimes discursive constructions of resilience are positive and empowering for writers. Building a healthy writing life can inspire important identity work as faculty decide who they want to be as scholars and people (stanza 18). The poem illustrates that writers are able to critically consider how the forces of academic discourse are shaping them for better or for worse. Resilience can come in the form of a reality check: "Get the fuck over yourself./You're not special" (stanza 18, lines 7-8). These lines showcase writers who are able to get outside of and critique discourses that aren't serving them in order to be resilient in living out their values. At the same time, the poem emphasizes how discourses of resilience rooted in neoliberal values can negatively shape writers' self-perceptions. Individualistic constructions of resilience are prevalent in neoliberal climates wherein faculty "are expected to compete and produce" (Stenberg, 2015, p. 7). Such constructions can be damaging when writers, like those in my study, internalize neoliberal constructions of resilience, such as "Good people are people who work hard" (stanza 18, line 2).

My composite poem raises provocative questions about faculty writers' expressions of resilience given the cultural value of resilience reinforced through neoliberal academic discourse. That many verses focus on experiences of adversity accentuated with flashes of resilience begs the question: Do faculty feel compelled by dominant discourses to find a silver lining in the midst of struggle? Might the prevalence of normative narratives of success coerce them into performing resilience? Do faculty celebrate "Learning how to do life better" (stanza 15, line 1), claim to be "…dislodging the association/between anxiety and writing" (stanza 23, lines 1-2), and admonish themselves to "Just let it be" (stanza 17, line 1) because they've been taught to want and expect themselves to be able to? If so, then the need to be and appear resilient, in a traditional sense, may very well be another source of adversity.

In their pursuit of resilience as a "desired good" (Bracke, 2016, p. 53), individuals often develop strategies for embracing and maintaining it, even if it means solidifying the conditions that demand resilience. For example, faculty writers find the resilience to endure the tenure track by believing that things will be better post-tenure. In the poem they say "Tenure has removed….shackles" (stanza 13, lines 1-2). They normalize and resign themselves to torment, they "…have to imagine Sisyphus is happy" (stanza 3, line 1) and "Just need to suffer through it" (stanza 16, line 6). In his study of the role "resilience" plays in the lives and identities of queer youth, Rob Cover (2016) calls this attitude "resilient hopefulness" (p. 358) wherein

the conditions that require resilience are presumed to be "timeless and unchangeable" (p. 359) so that individuals are "only able to find and develop resilience by looking beyond" (p. 358) the adverse circumstances that threaten hopelessness. Because "resilience is structurally linked with the threats against which it is supposed to give shelter," allowing adverse conditions in the present is necessary for maintaining resilience, which cannot exist without the "disaster or threat" that demands it (Bracke, 2016, p. 59). Resilient hopefulness serves this purpose, thwarting meaningful transformation of oppressive structures and practices that cause inhumane adversity detrimental to individual faculty writers and to the academic enterprise. As seen in my composite poem, faculty feel pressure to show resilience by conforming, submitting to how things are, fitting their "…round peg[s] into that square hole" (stanza 16, line 3).

In a similar vein, my composite poem highlights faculty writers' experiences of neoliberal discourse in which "resilience turns away from vulnerability" (Bracke, 2016, p. 59), and promotes suffering in silence. In the poem, faculty writers say "writing is such an alone thing" (stanza 10, line 1), a "Physical and mental torment" (stanza 24, line 1) they can never admit. At least one person "Went home and cried,/several times,/by myself" (stanza 26, lines 5-7). Faculty say you have to "Bargain with yourself" (stanza 24, line 2) about how much you can endure in silence. My poem depicts ways in which writers deeply feel, but cannot show vulnerability. Entrenched in neoliberal discourses of resilience, which are exploited and reinforced through academic discourse and culture, faculty writers are resigned to "…suffer through…" (stanza 16, line 6) hardship alone because vulnerability is not an option. My composite poem, however, normalizes vulnerability, puts struggling writers in community with one another—literally as their voices meld on the page, and more abstractly as faculty writers read the poem and see themselves in the collective voice reflected there. When I shared a draft of this chapter with a writer from my study, she responded,

> Thank you so much for sharing this with me. I think it is beautiful and brilliant.
>
> It feels like I have been trapped in this isolated prison and discovered an entire building full of other people experiencing the same thing.
>
> I want a simple image with the words "I am fucking doing it … stitching together my parachute" to hang in my workspace; that is powerful!

The importance of the sense of connection and community, of being seen, that this writer expressed cannot be understated, for according to feminist psychologist and scholar Judith V. Jordan (2004) "it is when we feel most separate from others and from the flow of life that we are at most risk" for exploitation and needless suffering (p. 36). Composite poetry leverages strength in numbers to push back

against problematic discourses; it makes visible shared (or at least resonant) experiences so that writers feel less alone and more empowered to (re)define resilience in ways that work for them. My composite poem shows how faculty writers' notions of resilience are often rooted in "a neoliberal social ontology that revolves around the individual" and ignores "the paralyzing effect that the complexity of our world has on that individual" (Bracke, 2016, p. 72). By crystalizing their experiences, I promote a "politics of resisting resilience" (Bracke, 2016, p. 72). At the same time, the multiple, layered truths illuminated through this method unearth the potential for what I call critical relational resilience (Tarabochia, 2021), wherein vulnerability is validated and encouraged as a rightful, necessary state of human connection integral to healthy resilience. The process of crafting composite poetry enacts those values and reinforces the necessary conditions for the kind of resilience it unearths by honoring vulnerability, inviting relationality, and disrupting the isolation that results from imposter syndrome, self-deprecation, and self-doubt.

As I've shown, creating composite poetry with transcripts from interviews with faculty writers revealed the ways in which resilience is constructed, nonlinear and discursive. Interrogating these qualities and how they function in faculty writers' lives surfaced alternative reconstructions of resilience as recursive, relational, collaborative, and vulnerable. By modeling how composite poetry allowed me to critically engage with the particular theme of resilience that emerged in my research I've shown how the method can foster transferrable critical relational practices needed to challenge and transform many different normative constructs at the heart of stock stories about writers that have long informed problematic beliefs and behaviors.

Occasions that Call for Composite Poetry

In this chapter, I've illustrated how composite poetry can be a promising tool for writing researchers using poetic inquiry to engage with qualitative data. I've described how composite poetry worked in my own research practice, emphasizing all it afforded me as a researcher and writer. Next, I identify several goals and occasions that might call for composite poetry as an approach to poetic inquiry so that researchers can discern when it might be an ideal approach for them. In my experience, composite poetry is particularly valuable when a researcher wants to

- honor distinct lived experience and simultaneously surface resonances among various participants' related experiences of a phenomenon;
- consider the perceptions or experiences of two or more groups of participants clustered around certain dimensions of difference;
- juxtapose messy, conflicting experiences of a common phenomenon so as to disrupt artificially smooth narratives that determine normative standards for writers and writing;
- problematize dominant constructs and ideologies that presume who or what writers should be and what they should strive for;

- disrupt forces that reinforce the status quo by isolating people from one another and encouraging self-blame for hardship that is actually common and often rooted in structural inequity; and
- foster a relationship with readers by communicating resonant emotion and experience.

Anne Sullivan (2009) describes "occasions" for poetry as a way to help potential poetic inquirers determine if the data in front of them calls for poetic rendering. She identifies occasions along six domains: concreteness, voice, emotion, ambiguity, associative logic, and tension. Discovery of these occasions in a set of data could inspire all kinds of poetic representation. Certain *ways* they appear in concert with the purposes listed above could signal the possibility of composite poetry as a particularly suitable approach. In what follows, I elaborate on each occasion and suggest qualities for each that might point toward composite poetry.

According to Sullivan (2009) the domain of concreteness is about embodiment, the senses; "There must be things to see, hear, smell, taste, touch" (p. 112). When data reveals how research participants feel, not just one person but many people, composite poetry can prompt readers to feel along with them. When the words of participants include metaphors that tie abstraction to image in a way that "makes it possible for [readers] to know, in the body," what the participant experienced, composite poetry can bring those metaphorical meanings to life (Sullivan, 2009, p. 113). Composite poetry says, "I/we see you," "You are not alone," "Me/us too." A provocative example of the power of composite poetry to evoke connection through resonant embodied feeling is the participant in my study who upon reading a draft of my composite poem longed to hang above her desk the words "I am fucking doing it … stitching together my parachute." The concrete image of that stitched-together parachute, invoked by the words of another participant, a fellow faculty writer, and communicated in a collective voice, was deeply moving and meaningful for her.

Voice is another occasion for poetic inquiry that calls for the affordances of composite poetry, depending on how it appears in the data. To drive home the power of voice in poetry, Anne Sullivan (2009) quotes premier American poet Mark Strand's musing that good poems "have a voice and the formation of that voice … may be the true occasion for their existence" (p. 114). Sullivan (2009) explains that "the human voice, authentic and resonant with emotion and experience, has its own sort of concreteness" (p. 114). In the case of composite poetry, the human voice of individual participants does the work of bringing image, emotion and experience to life, the message made all the more powerful because it is communicated through a collective voice. The echo chamber of multiple voices blending into one amplifies the personal, and transforms emotions or experiences that could be interpreted, even dismissed, as idiosyncratic into a foundation for camaraderie, community, and/or common ground.

Attending to voice through composite poetry can be an alternative to more traditional approaches to qualitative coding focused on identifying themes

across data sets. As with thematic coding, crafting composite poetry involves gathering sentiments that speak to an identified concept, question, or phenomenon—adversity and resilience in the case of the poem featured in this chapter. But rather than abstract the theme from the data and then use illustrative quotes or excerpts to illustrate, composite poetry mines data for nuanced expressions that maintain concreteness and voice, that remain provocative and alive, even as they reverberate with one another and beckon readers to be buoyed by the sound, held by it. The poem IS the research; the poem IS the analysis. Readers are invited to reflect on their own lived experiences and their relationships to the collective voice manifested in the poem. Relationality is centered in composite poetry.

In a similar vein, composite poetry is a valuable tool for normalizing the role of emotion, including negative emotion, for writers and writing lives. Emotion is a particularly important occasion for composite poetry in contexts like academia that privilege the life of the mind wherein emotion is often treated as an inconvenient distraction, a weakness to be managed or overcome. The collectivity of composite poetry allows for emotional vulnerability that may not be possible in other types of poetic inquiry and resists dominant, neoliberal ideologies that pitch vulnerability as weakness. Expressing emotion, "with all its human raggedness and volatile ambiguity" (Sullivan, 2009, p. 119), in the voice of the many rejects common misperceptions that writing is a disembodied independent, cognitive activity and recenters emotion as an essential component for all writers. Composite poetry not only "give[s] access to…emotion" by highlighting the intersecting emotions of others, but also prompts readers to access emotion by remembering their own past experiences of emotion or even to "*hav[e]* an emotional experience through the particulars of the poem" (Sullivan, 2009, p. 118). These affordances make composite poetry an apt choice for accessing human dimensions of writers and writing lives not always centered with other qualitative methods and for inviting readers to directly engage along those dimensions as they interact with the poem. In this way, the poems themselves and the experiences they offer are subversive, making visible and conjuring embodied, emotional experiences that tend to be ignored, hidden, or rejected by the dominant cultures writers inhabit.

Ambiguity is another occasion for composite poetry, as poetic form can honor the messiness of human existence. Although composite poetry offers insight by surfacing resonant emotions and experiences among writers (the collective voice), because composite poetry also honors and distills the uniqueness of particular realities (the words of individual participants), realities that are distinct, even in conflict, composite poetry also leverages the ambiguousness of poetic sense making to represent data that have no clear meaning or interpretation. According to Anne Sullivan (2009), data "rife with ambiguity, open-endedness, paradox, mysteries, unresolved complexity" presents "an occasion for poetry" (p. 119). Moreover, I found composite poetry to be a particularly valuable tool for troubling assumptions that pin mystery, paradox and anomaly to difficult

or struggling writers as indicators of deficit. Sullivan (2009) explains that "in poetry, non-linearity is a source of energy and interest, an asset, generally, rather than a problem" (p. 120). Composite poetry celebrates the presence and value of "unresolved complexity" (Sullivan, 2009, p. 119) at the heart of all writing lives.

Finally, composite poetry is a promising tool when researchers want to crystalize threads we see emerging in a qualitative data set. The need to embrace what Sullivan (2009) calls associative logic is another occasion for composite poetry. As Sullivan (2009) points out, poems often eschew "principles of linear, traditional Western logic" and operate instead "according to a set of complex principles related to web-like relations" (p. 120). Holding "in a close association" this web of connections, creating "a single unity," is the work of a poem (Sullivan, 2009, p. 120). Composite poems, in particular, leverage the associative logic of poetic invention bringing into relationship sentiments and experiences of individuals that otherwise might remain isolated or be subsumed in an effort to identify common trends. Sometimes, according to Sullivan (2009), associative logic is present in the research material we encounter—"connections, associations, linkages of conscious and unconscious elements, memory and emotion, past, present and future merging in the process of making meaning" (p. 121). Data in which these complexities inhere is ripe for poetic inquiry and composite poetry in particular because poetic form itself honors, maintains, and enacts those very processes. Composite poetry is a fitting response when from the data emerges "a sort of coherence that signals the occasion for a structure that holds together by associative, rather than linear logic" (Sullivan, 2009, p. 122).

According to Sullivan (2009), other occasions—concreteness, voice, emotion, ambiguity—"are all part of the complex architecture of a poem's associative logic" (p. 122). I've suggested here when each occasion might signal the usefulness of composite poetry as a particular tool for poetic inquiry. One more poetic occasion is worth naming in an effort to intuit when qualitative data might call for composite poetry—tension. Sullivan (2009) names a nexus of tensions that might emerge in research material several of which gesture to the unique affordances of composite poetry, including "tensions among the voices of participants or within the contradictions of a single voice"; between "ambiguity and clarity"; "self and other"; "the embodied and the conceptual," "the personal and the communal"; and "expression and constraint" among others (p. 122). Composite poetry captures and holds these tensions as essential to the poetic experience, an experience that resists "the habit of conclusion," mirroring instead the "motions of the mind," the firing of impulses across synapses, "incorporating the honesty and complexity of ambiguity, inviting the reader to construct meaning" (Sullivan, 2009, p. 123). This intuitive methodological (researcher-based), meaning-making (reader-based) process is apt for writing research because it echoes the complexities of writing, writing lives, and writer development.

Composite poetry, as a response to such occasions in qualitative research, functions as a feminist rhetorical practice (Royster & Kirsch, 2012), for it invites

"strategic contemplation" (p. 84), encourages "dialogical viewing and dialectical thinking" as "exploratory tools" for "shaking out features, factors, and details multidimensionally … in order to clarify the materiality of ideas, arguments, sites, and situations; to see more substantively what features and components are visible, what is cast in shadow, and what may be missing" (p. 89). The effect is to "complicate our sense of reality and relationships, making the nature of the multiplicities clearer and more manageable, rather than trying to simplify or oversimplify them" (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 90). Composite poetry engages "strategic contemplation as a critical meditative process" that ensures "levels of understanding function polyphonically and in high definition" (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 90). Understanding is not foisted upon readers, but rather coalesces amidst the reverberation of experiences and sentiments, different for each reader and in each reading depending on the forces shaping the acoustics in any given moment. Composite poetry allows us—researchers and readers—to get in close, what Jacquline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch (2012) call "tacking in" and to stand back, "tack out," to "observe, reflect, and meditate" on the "patterns and possibilities that may exist in support of knowledge creation and understanding" (p. 90). The telescopic quality makes composite poetry uniquely able to capture and interrogate nuanced similarities and differences in human experience.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I've traced how goals and occasions like those described above led me to composite poetry. Although faculty writers in my study were rooted in different lives and contexts, their depictions of their experiences of and responses to adversity resonated, intersected and built on each other like waves. Through composite poetry, I was able to capture this relationship between individual participants and an amalgamated story; between the one collective voice of the poem and the many readers who may find resonance there; between me as researcher-poet and faculty writer with my own lived experiences and each research participant sharing stories that spoke to me in the data. For me, exploring these relationships led to questions about when, why, for whom and to what effect adversity and (various forms of) resilience are necessary, even valuable, and when, why, and for whom adversity might be needless, dominant notions of resilience damaging and untenable, and the effects of discourses around resilience detrimental. In demonstrating how composite poetry made way for critical questions about the construct of resilience, I hope to prompt writing researchers to notice the constructs operating in their own contexts and consider how crafting composite poems might similarly spark critical inquiry and the interrogation of problematic discursive forces and systems that enable and constrain opportunities for writers.

Chapter 2. Poetry Clusters: Constellating Meaning in Writers' Lives

As I've embraced poetic inquiry to study the lived experience of faculty writers, I have found cluster poetry, the construction of "a series or 'cluster' of poems around a theme" to be a "powerful way of expressing a range of subtle nuances about a topic while simultaneously producing a more general overview" of that topic (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009, p. 4). Like composite poems, poetry clusters throw into relief the complex relationship between the uniqueness of individual experiences and connections among experiences had by individuals with shared circumstances. Unlike composite poems, however, in which words of multiple research participants are intermingled without explicit distinction, each poem in a cluster is crafted from the words of a single participant or source text, or is generated by a single researcher. Each individual poem could "stand on its own and provid[e] a specific viewpoint on the experience," but read together they form a cluster that "provides various nuances" that point to different aspects of the experience, allowing "for a more multi-vocal understanding of a phenomenon" (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009, p. 5).

Simultaneity makes cluster poetry uniquely valuable. Clustering inspires "a simultaneous appreciation of experience" that "removes the need to move back and forth from the particular to the general and … [ultimately] provides a richer understanding of the phenomenon" (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009, p. 4). Each poem depicts the concrete materiality of a lived experience, inviting "an up-close and granular reading of a theme" (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009, p. 4); when compiled, the separate, sometimes even contradictory poems, offer a wider view, a more general reading of a theme or phenomenon without obscuring or smoothing out differences. In this way, cluster poetry allows researchers to counter the hegemony of traditional approaches and renditions by conveying a messy, agonizingly real, incongruous kind of "truth" while concomitantly discovering "something more" in their research—"the revelation" of dimensions of a theme or phenomenon "that might not otherwise be revealed" (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009, p. 4; see also Faulkner, 2020). By honoring the partiality, the tentativeness of individual perceptions and experiences, poetry clusters elucidate "the subtle variations of a phenomenon" and create "a prism-like rendition" that is powerful and compelling, whole if not complete (Butler-Kisber, 2012, p. 166). Of the questions poetic inquiry invites researchers to embrace, cluster poetry is ideal for those compelled by the following:

- How can I more fully honor the nuance of participants' lived experience?
- How do I stay accountable to those experiences traditional research tools are most likely to miss or flatten?

- How might I orient to my work not as an objective analyst but as a "vulnerable observer" (Behar, 1996) immersed in the process?
- How can my research directly challenge and begin to transform structures and systems that privilege certain bodyminds (Price, 2015) over others?
- How can I honor and draw forth my work from the rich historical roots of theories of the flesh, forged by women of color to theorize from physical realities and embodied experience?

In pursuit of such questions, poetry clusters can be used to represent data and analyze data, to present the poetically interpreted and arranged words of participants to readers, and to use scholarship and experience in the process of making sense of qualitative data. Clusters can consist of found poems created from interview transcripts, found poems using words from published literature, or generated poems—original, often autobiographical poems crafted from researchers' own words as they work to understand their own and others' experiences (Butler-Kisber, 2012; Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009; Faulkner, 2020). Poems in a series can be crafted by one or multiple poets, say members of a research team, and they can come from one or several different source texts, different pieces of published literature or transcripts from interviews with different study participants.

For example, to try to understand what life is like for young people coming to terms with sex and gender differences, Kristopher Wells (2004), created a cluster of found poetry crafted from interviews with four queer youth about their experiences in school. Wells' total of twelve poems consists of clusters of several (between two and four) poems crafted from interviews with each participant. Each poem renders an aspect of life from the perspective of a particular young person "on a personal, temporal and evocative level" (Wells, 2004, p. 8). Sets of poems crafted from words of the same participant combine to depict multiple dimensions of their lived experience. Taken together, the series of poems "serve[s] as a map that explores the ways in which Queer youth navigate, resist, reclaim, and make use of the available discourses that surround them to construct and challenge representations of their everyday realities" (Wells, 2004, p. 8).

In a similar vein, Elizabeth J. Meyer (2008) created "identity poems" from the transcripts of secondary teachers reflecting on their experiences and perceptions of bullying in school. She interviewed three teachers three times and used the sets of transcripts to create a narrative profile for each teacher. Meyer (2008) then composed a found poem from each profile, creating a portrait of each individual that offered a "brief, yet emotionally powerful representation of the internal influences that shaped a teacher's daily actions and choices" (Meyer, 2008, p. 202). Arranged in a series, the separate identity poems demonstrate the influence of personal identities and educational biographies in shaping perceptions and actions and make visible shared phenomenon such as how the experience of feeling marginalized due to minoritized identities motivated action against discriminatory behavior (Meyer, 2008).

Whereas Wells (2004) and Meyer (2008) created poetry clusters with found poems crafted from interview transcripts, Butler-Kisber & Stewart (2009) model the power of clustering with generated poetry (Butler-Kisber, 2012). Their cluster on "Death and Dying" consists of poems written by each of them during times when they were grieving the loss of loved ones (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009). Each poem on its own offers a reflection on the experience of dying rooted in the particularities of a lived experience. Read as whole, however, the cluster "provides various nuances that point vividly to the mundane aspects of dying, [and] the inevitable interconnectedness between living and dying" among other insights (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009, p. 5). Their work shows how clusters generated by two or more poets can create "a more multi-vocal understanding of a phenomenon" (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009, p. 5). Generated cluster poetry can also be single-authored, as with Butler-Kisber's series "School Days" in which each poem re-creates particular memories from elementary school and high school (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009). As a whole, the cluster "speaks to the multi-layered…cumulative effects" of schooling that often go unnoticed, without eliding the nuances of specific experiences (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009, p. 5).

Prendergast (2006) demonstrates a third type of poetry cluster, one using found poems crafted from published scholarship rather than interview transcripts. She created found poetry from theoretical literature on contemporary continental philosophy and performance theory and used the arranged "suite" of "literature-voiced research poems" to distill her secondary research as part of the literature review for her doctoral dissertation (Prendergast, 2006, p. 369). She applies an approach similar to the one used to create found research poems from participant data, "intuitively sorting out words, phrases, sentences, and passages that synthesize meaning," in this case from published prose, "in the light of a particular research question" (Prendergast, 2006, p. 370). The process of creating this kind of cluster poem engages and represents the poet's sense-making processes; it is "reflexive in that the researcher is interconnected with the researched," in this case secondary research, and in that "the researcher's own affective response to the process informs it" (Prendergast, 2006, p. 370). All of the words in Prendergast's (2006) poems can be found in the original source text, which she cites, though she plays with line breaks, arrangement of words on the page, parentheses and repetition "in an attempt to capture a number of different, and valuable, voices and theoretical perspectives" (p. 372). No matter the version, cluster poetry shines as a type of poetic inquiry that invites researchers to focus on a central topic or theme, weaving in, around, and through a main idea from various perspectives.

In what follows, I use a blend of these approaches to demonstrate the value of cluster poetry for studying and representing the lived experience of writers. As is typical of cluster poetry, my series explores a particular theme: academic motherhood. In the following section, I explain how that theme emerged and how the

series featured in this chapter seeks to engage it. My poetry cluster includes found poems from the transcripts of several participants in my study; generated poems written in my own words as I reflected on the stories faculty writers shared with me and pondered my own writing life; and found poems crafted from published literature created as I engaged with secondary research as a way to put the lived experience of faculty writers (my own and those of study participants) in conversation with extant theories and scholarship.

In creating, weaving, and juxtaposing poems in the series, I remained cognizant of my positionality as a cisgender, enabled, middle-class, white settler mother with access to higher education, reckoning again and again with the reality that, as Renata Harden Ferdinand (2022) puts it, "my motherhood is stained with privilege" (p. 141). Taking my cue from Kimberly Wieser-Weryackwe and colleagues (2023) I realize that my "choices regarding identification and dissociation, what is worth saying and what is not, have major consequences in terms of who is seen as worthy of inclusion, attention, care, and respect and whose positionalities, perspectives, and participation receive space, resources, and esteem" (p. 10). Thus, even as I craved resonance and camaraderie with other mothers navigating shared challenges of academic motherhood, I actively sought out divergence and difference across a range of dimensions and lived experiences. The transcripts and published scholarship I drew on became more than source texts for found poetry; they infused the method itself, prompting recursive engagement with stories from participants in my study and from published scholarship, inspiring reflexive self-generated poems, shaping the arrangement of poems in the cluster, and sparking unexpected interpretations. By reflecting on my process of creating cluster poetry to explore and represent a resonant theme from my research, I hope to inspire readers to imagine instances in their own research that might call for this particular poetic method and model one approach for embracing those opportunities.

Clustering Around Academic Motherhood

My son was born in May 2009 near the end of my fourth year in my doctoral program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I was writing my dissertation, and I remember oscillating between feeling crushed beneath the enormity of tackling two high stakes challenges—new motherhood and finishing my PhD—*and* feeling grateful for the perspective their juxtaposition offered. When I couldn't think anymore, when I felt unintelligent, inherently incapable of producing a book-length piece of scholarship, I lingered over mothering tasks, marveled at the tender magic of breast feeding, gazed in awe at tiny slippery limbs in the bath, the rise and fall of my son's chest, delicate fluttering of his eye lashes while he slept. And when I was completely overwhelmed by the all-encompassing responsibility of mothering, when I found myself sobbing alongside my screaming infant who did not want to eat, sweaty, milk-stained shirt clinging to my aching breasts,

feeling inept in every way, I reveled in my time at the computer, grappling with theory, working through interview data, playing with text on the page.

Gabe turned two the year I accepted my first (and current) tenure-track faculty position in Oklahoma. I remember licking from my lips and fingers sticky red icing from the Elmo cake we'd devoured for his birthday breakfast as my partner and I kissed him goodbye, thanked grandma for flying in, and drove from Nebraska to Oklahoma to find a place to live. I was the only woman faculty member with small children in my new department, and while my colleagues graciously welcomed me and my family, mothering on the tenure track was a lonely experience that often felt fractured and fraught. Now, as I write this, my second book, the one required for promotion to full professor, Gabe is 14 and navigating his first year in high school. Playing chauffer to an active teenager could be a full time job. We struggle to protect one or two family dinners a week, and my partner and I often have little contact beyond an encouraging fist bump as we pass each other between chores or hand off our teen between activities.

All this to say, "mother" and "academic" have always been closely adjacent if not intimately connected identities for me. Processing revise and resubmit feedback from journal reviewers from the sidelines of a soccer game, writing the proposal for this book in the bleachers at a summer sports camp—writing and mothering, as much as they feel in conflict, even irreconcilable at times, are inextricable for me. It makes sense, then, that when faculty writers in my study shared experiences about parenting, especially mothering, as academics, their stories resonated with me in deeply moving, often visceral ways. They provoked and inspired me, made me laugh, cry, feel proud of my decisions and achievements, and doubt myself and my choices. When "dual pandemics" of COVID-19 and increased attention to systemic racial injustice (Yeh et al., 2022), created unique challenges for parents, especially mothers, in academia, we commiserated, consoled, reassured, delighted, heartened one another. We raged together about social and structural inequities that were not new but seemed in some cases more widely visible and intense.

I craved an intellectual, creative, human space to process the stories of mothering that emerged in my study and to reflect on who I was as a mother and a scholar in relation to my unfolding work. Cluster poetry offered an ideal method for the reflexive, relational, epistemological, ontological work I longed for. I wrote found poems from sections of transcripts describing experiences of mothering. I also generated poems using my own words to express my understanding of my own and others' experiences with academic motherhood and "to explore and reflect upon research memories, roles and assumptions" (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009, p. 4). Some of the poems I generated were composed in the context of meeting with a group of people who identified as academic mothers at my institution, a group I co-founded with a colleague in a leadership position in diversity, equity, and inclusion.

My experience in that group surely impacted my engagement with stories about mothering from faculty writers in my study, so I'll say a bit more about it here. Our group represented a range of intersectional identities, axes of difference (including age, race, family structure), and institutional positions (a teaching professor, research professor, program administrator, department chair, and central administrator). We had children ranging from toddlers to teenagers, which allowed for rich conversation and reflection, and for openly addressing fears and hopes for the future. The differences and similarities in our lived experiences cultivated an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 1989, 2015), and prompted me to reflect critically on my unique positionality and the privileges it affords, particularly in terms of whiteness, ableism, and heteronormativity. We met biweekly for several semesters to share our experiences, successes, worries, questions, and frustrations as both mothers and scholars living and working in spaces that tend to devalue one or the other identity. Our group became "a consistent organic space to evaluate, reconsider, interrogate, and revise motherfull decisions and experiences" (Howard et al, 2023, p. 596). Topics of conversation included race/racism, gender identity, sexual identity, ableism/disability, interracial co-parenting, religion and spiritual understanding, and mothering our children in light of their evolving identities. Our collaboration led to two presentations at the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education (NCORE) and an article in progress. A central theme of our work was to grapple with and begin to establish our own definition of what Joy Howard and colleagues (2023) call "motherscholaring" and consider what it could mean for us, individually and collectively, to lean into the identity of motherscholar[13] in our local context.

As part of my work with this group and in the process of putting into conversation found poems from interviews with writers in my study and generated poems reflecting on my own experience of academic motherhood, I have sought out published scholarship about mothering and motherscholaring in the field of rhetoric and composition and beyond. Thus, I include found poems composed from literature discovered through secondary research as a way to consider how published narratives and existing theories resonate (or not) with my experience and the stories of this particular group of faculty writers. By clustering these types of poems—found research poems, generated poems and literature-voiced poems—I begin to capture the "radical specificity" (Sotirin, 2010) of motherscholaring (Howard et al., 2023).

13. I chose motherscholaring as the theme for this poetry series because of the centrality of the concept to the group I was a part of. We wrestled with the potential for exclusion involved with choosing "mother" instead of parent or caregiver but ultimately decided to stick with "mother" because it gestured toward particular histories, locations and experiences for us and others who might identify with the term/identity. Howard et al. (2023) likewise describe the significance of the term for their collective "soulwork" (p. 596) even as they acknowledge the work and experiences of other "parentscholars," including those who identify as "Other-mothers and fathers" (p. 608).

Clustering Poems to Capture the Radical Specificity of Motherscholaring

Poetry clusters can be constructed around almost any theme—death and dying (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009), school experiences (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009; Wells, 2004), bullying (Meyer, 2008); scholarly concepts and theories (Prendergast, 2006), family stories (Faulkner, 2014), etc. The value is in the way clustering individual poems honors nuance, including tension and conflict, as it creates a multidimensional, multivoiced exploration of a topic or phenomenon. As I show in this chapter, the affordances of cluster poetry are particularly apt for honoring what Patricia Sotirin (2010) calls "radical specificity"—the ungeneralizable intimacy and intensity of sensations, events, emotions and relations—of motherscholaring (Howard et al., 2023).

According to Joy Howard, Kindel Nash, and Candace Thompson (2023), Cheryl Matias coined the term motherscholar in 2011 to describe "the inseparable identities of being both mother and scholar, both-and not either-or" (Matia, 2011, as cited in Howard et al., 2023, p. 591). Extending the initial definition, they understand motherscholaring "as a mode of intellectual and spiritual travel, soulwork, epistemologically rooted in love, occurring at the intersections of personal and professional theories, research, and practices that move toward social justice"(Howard et al., 2023, p. 591). Whether or not they use the term, others have critically explored the simultaneity and liminality of mothering and scholaring as well. For example, in her Black, feminist autoethnography, Renata Harden Ferdinand (2022) weaves narrative storytelling, critical self-reflection, theory, and scholarship to tell her story as a Black mother and academic—a story, in her words, "of living, of surviving, of falling down, of standing up, of giving up, of struggling, of keeping the faith, of crying, of laughing, of remembering, of forgetting, of coping, of teaching, of learning, of growing" (p. 140). For her autoethnography provided a means to engage the messiness of Black motherhood in ways the "good girl," smart student, rule-following expectations of academia didn't always honor or allow. With experiences of Black mothers largely absent from mainstream texts and even published scholarship in academic studies of motherhood, Ferdinand wrote the book she craved.

Relatedly, in *The Chicana M(other)work Anthology* (2019), editors Cecilia Caballero, Yvette Martínez-Vu, Judith Pérez-Torres, Michelle Téllez, Christine X. Vega, and Ana Castillo collect "research, *testimonios*, and essays about Chicana and other Women of Color (WOC) mothering" (p. 3) as a "call to action for justice within and outside academia" (p. 6). Borrowing the term "motherwork" from Patricia Hill Collins (2000), they use parenthesis to gesture toward what they call "layered care work" (p. 5), a form of self and communal care that moves across contexts, relationships, and time. M(other)work unfolds across the collection with various points of focus, including migration, state violence, reproductive

justice, pregnancy, and loss. Several contributors theorize and enact "mother-scholaring" in particular as it occurs in academic contexts.

In "Mothering the Academy: An Intersectional Approach to Deconstruct and Expose the Experiences of Mother-Scholars of Color in Higher Education," four doctoral students of Guatemalan, Indian, Iranian, and Mexican origins, highlight how agency and empowerment emerged from what they call "Mother-Scholar overlap (MSO)," a generative cojoining of mother and scholar identities that enriches (non)academic spaces mother-scholars of color inhabit (Hernández-Johnson, et al. 2019, p. 129). Likewise focused on experiences of student-parents, Nora Cisneros and colleagues (2019) describe grassroots efforts of Mothers of Color in Academia (MOCA) to challenge exclusionary practices through "fierce mothering" (p. 289) a framework inspired by Grace Gámez (2015) and concepts of Chicana feminist praxis (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). In a slightly different vein, Alma Itzé Flores (2019) draws on findings from her study of daughters—Chicana first-generation college students raised in Latinx working-class communities in Los Angeles—and their immigrant mothers—who had little formal education but were integral in their high-achieving daughters' education—to theorize a "Chicana mother-daughter spiritual praxis" (p. 196) that supports advanced educational achievements.

These examples demonstrate how vast experiences of motherwork and mother-scholaring intersect and diverge within and across a diverse range of contexts. Cluster poetry is well suited for capturing the rich overlaps and vital differences because as Howard et al. (2023) explain theory and methodology are intertwined: poetic inquiry and motherscholaring can be viewed as both noun (idea, form, material examples of living theory) and verb (action, process, doing through embodied experience). My use of cluster poetry to reflexively probe motherscholaring as a living theory and embodied process is inspired by their collaborative autoethnographic poetic inquiry through which they embrace collective storytelling, honor researchers' voice(s) and experiences, and seek to humanize research, "blur[ring] the lines between researcher and researched" (Howard et al., 2023, p. 601). Blending autoethnographic and multivocal elements, cluster poetry enables me as a researcher to inhabit the vulnerable space necessary to study my own lived experience of motherscholaring—to "bare heart and soul, skin and bone"—and to "expres[s] and authentically represent[t] multiple meanings and complex ways of being, acting, and experiencing the world" (Howard et al., 2023, p. 603). A vital alternative to traditional academic research methods and writing conventions that may never capture "adequately or accurately" (Howard et al., 2023, p. 604) the complexity of "love, joy, pain, rage, anger, dissonance, change, shame, and discomfort" (p. 602), cluster poetry is ideal for engaging a phenomenon like motherscholaring, that is both achingly personal and widely experienced.

Working across specificities and distinctions, cluster poetry begets what Patty Sotirin (2010) citing philosopher Elizabeth Grosz calls "*radical specificity* of lived experience, 'the plethora of sensations, vibrations, movements, and intensities

that constitute both our world and ourselves'" (p. 2). In "Autoethnograhic Mother-Writing: Advocating Radical Specificity," Sotirin (2010) makes a distinction between autoethnographic practice and autobiographical writing that is useful for understanding the concept of radical specificity. According to Sotirin (2010), while autobiographical memoirs focused on motherhood honor difference "as a way of representing a shared condition or nature," autoethnographic mother-writing should "confront us not with what is recognizable about another's experiences but with the specificity of experience itself" (p. 8). Instead of evoking "empathy" or "cultural insight" around what we know, for example "the shared angst of momhood," autoethnograhic mother-writing should offer "a lived narrative that doesn't come with an automatic sense of what its significance might be" (Sotirin, 2010, p. 8). The goal is to provoke readers with "the *radical specificity* of living a life, not in the sense that we all live our own lives but in the sense that life is lived in the flows, multiplicities, and provisionality of each moment, event, emotion" (Sotirin, 2010, p. 8). It's about resonance across difference.

Following Deleuze, Sotirin (2010) explains that radical specificity shifts away from "the relation between 'this' moment in its generalizable features with other such moments toward a sense of 'thisness' that retains its specificity" (p. 9). Ferdinand (2022) aims for radical specificity when she draws on her situated, individual experience of mothering as a Black academic to surface struggles common to Black women/motherhood without claiming to speak for all Black mothers. Relatedly, Danielle M. Stern's (2020) embodied autoethnography examining "the debt of heteronormativity" illustrates radical specificity as a reflexive moment of reckoning that emerges from a research process focused on the particularity of lived experience and committed to "queer, open, fluid, mobile forms that reveal the joy in the messiness and possibility" (p. 109). Thus, radical specificity is not about representing shared nor distinctive experiences but, more rhizomatically, about "movement of senses and perceptions" that surface and inspire "lines of flight that do not converge upon shared passions or pain but that disrupt or disregard ready commonalities and assumed connections" and lead to new ways of thinking, researching, surviving, and resisting (Sotirin, 2010, p. 10). In the case of my project, cluster poetry evokes radical specificity by refusing to collapse motherscholaring into "something shared and understandable"; it eschews "reassurances of comprehensibility and transparency" in order to be "begin to think differently about what we know and what we might become" (Sotirin, 2010, p. 8). My poetry cluster circles around the "thisness" of motherscholaring in ways that provoke reflection and connection across difference.

Poetry clusters are well suited for inviting researchers and readers alike to lean into radical specificity because they invite engagement with what can never be communicated fully or directly. Reflecting on the first comprehensive anthology of Native poetry, editor Joy Harjo, the first Native American (Muscogee Nation) poet to be named Poet Laureate of the United States, marveled at what poetry can do in this regard: "Poetry can hold grief so immense that there's nothing else [that] can contain it; poetry can hold stories that are dense or unspeakable;

poetry can hold joy and awe; poetry can hold the contradictory parts of ourselves … . Sometimes three or four little lines can hold a whole lifetime" (cited in D'isa, 2020). Cluster poetry holds in relation many poems that become immense, dense, radically specific fragments and invites us to revel in the silences, spaces, gaps, abstractions and associative meanings—both within and across poems—to look beyond familiar scenes and "empathic resonances," to resist assumptions about "common grounds or conditions," in my case those underlying mothering in academia (Sotirin, 2010, p. 11). It is this capacity to illuminate infinite facets of what can never be fully known, to push beyond empathy and the complacency that comes with resting on common ground, that draws me to cluster poetry.

The move to resist the "maternal … humane impulse" (Sotirin, 2010, p. 11) to understand how others feel and feel understood ourselves can be a radical act. Sotirin (2010) suggests that to privilege understanding is to "repress what cannot be known or said about [a] particular experience, event, or life in favor of what can be shared, communicated, and held in common," and thus to stifle "the opportunity to think beyond the dominant, the familiar, and the common" (p. 11). By conjuring the radical specificity of motherscholaring, my poetry cluster seeks to deconstruct dominant narratives, emotional "truths," and common critiques that characterize familiar stories of mothering in academia. My hope is that it entices readers to join me in critiquing the "banal ways we engage the world," so that we might relinquish our conditioned assumption that life is "comprehensible, perceptible, amenable to representation, and conducive to our own purposes and projects" (Sotirin, 2010, p. 12) and consider new lines of flight and flow, new ways of seeing and being in the world.

The poems in the following cluster have many different sources. Some are author generated, written in my own words as a way to reflect on my experience of mothering as a scholar. Others are found poems crafted from interview transcripts as I worked to capture and understand my study participants' different experiences of mothering (or not) and scholaring. Still other poems are found poems crafted from published work, as I intentionally searched for diverse experiences of mothering within and beyond the academy. One poem was written by my son, Gabe, included with his permission. I include a note about the source text after each poem to honor and emphasize the range of voices and experiences represented here. I decided to significantly indent the attributions so that they are accessible for readers without disrupting a holistic reading of the poems as a cluster.

[Hurt-Heal-Rage-] Write Like a Mother: A Poetic Cluster

Unfold *Only* in the Sharing

Abundance of life's stories within us
myriad of … people, identities, places,

experiences carefully crafted
open so beautifully the inner
landscape of an academic life.

– From Cynthia B. Dillard (2006)

Hobbling Along

I'm a writer who is hobbling along,
trying to do what I can in the pockets of energy
I can muster. I'm a writer who's trying to
meet her commitments
make *enough* commitments
that writing gets done.

I'm a writer who wants to write … but right now?
I'm a writer who is afraid, as I feel ... just now …
giant baby movement.
Less than two weeks out.

– From Betty's 2021 interview transcript

How to Make a Tenure Case

Stand there answering
bullshit questions feel
the breast milk drip
down get back
to the baby run
home and wait—
lactating still
bleeding—
        for the results.

– From Victoria's 2019 interview transcript

On The Front Lines

Mothering is love
by any means necessary.

Mamas on the margins
punk mamas in the valleys.

Breast-fed in ripped t-shirts
leather cuffs, purples/blue/green hair.

Palestinian mothers, toddlers hiding
listened quietly to military bombing.
Congolese mothers, rape survivors.
Teenage Black mamas fought for
the right to give birth.

Sudanese refugee mamas in crumbling
ghettos, waiting for a new life.
Egyptian mama "Day of Rage" one
child on shoulder, other by the hand
faced down tear gas, water cannons.

In this life of exile
revolution and mamas
feed my life.

– From Loretta J. Ross (2016)

Kids Welcome

First faculty position, warm invitation
Drinks at 8, heavy hors d'oeuvres
Two-year-old glee on the edge of
passed-bedtime ~~bliss~~ exhaustion
Crystal coffee table holds tiered truffles
delicate puffed pastries, tea lights aglow
Aghast, gasping, *don't* touch, *don't* run, *wait*, *stop*
Sliding glass door, open, summer breeze sweeps
across…the swimming pool (!), roiling in the Oklahoma wind
cactus plants squat lazily, treacherous waders waiting

– Author-generated poem

For G

There is a poem in this place.
Open-faced eyes over easy
downy-soft wisps of toddler

blonde, Velcro shoes and
snap-up overalls. Always an
arm clinging, protective
hand in the frame, holding
you up. Smile, don't slip.

There is a poem in this place.
Good-natured grin, goofy
o-shaped lips, tough-guy tongue,
backwards ball cap, tie-dye tee,
signature Adidas jacket and
mismatched socks.
Remember, running
through the rain, ice cream
cones drenched and drooping,
dropping, plopping into
puddles as we dashed,
laughing, for cover,
for home.

– Author-generated poem

Default Option

Settled into stable domesticity
by the time I turned 36: married, job,
two-bedroom house, quiet street,
college town, orange tabby named Woody.

Marital tradition pulling, nagging
for offspring, for routine.
No plan to have human children.

Friends ask, whispered speculations, vivid
descriptions of non-existent [offspring].
Incongruous: responsible, nurturing
woman has chosen not to be mother.

Society finds me illegible,
grown woman, not

mother pitied until, *gasp*,
she becomes incomprehensible.

Why would you—? Why wouldn't you—?
You'll eventually want to…

– From study participant Julie's
unpublished essay *Cat Abortion*

Indulgence

I was supposed to:
wake up
kids to school,
coffee, a run,
sit down and write
couple thousand words,
a bubble bath…

Tired so tired.
Every imaginable way:
physically
emotionally
spiritually.

Took a nap the other day.
I was sick. Basic human need
treated like indulgence.

– From Elizabeth's 2021 interview transcript

Spectacular Bodies

Silence, endemic embers ravenous,
consumptive "institutional polishing."*
What happens when our bodies
GET LOUD, so to speak? Story
opens a widow ushering in
a gush of fresh air.

Survivor's guilt from brutal market
encasing of one fruit and flesh of another.

Accumulation of racist acts *head down*
lie low, silent in the face of power.
Fine line visible but unheard, marked
different but conform.

Fear of becoming unsightly spectacle,
cannot trust power to defend the vulnerable.
Make this a public fight to reclaim personhood
in the midst of laborious tumult, a miscarriage.
Afraid to publicly mourn "heavy period"
What agony…

A mother's failure, toll on a mother's body.
Life could not be bracketed, broke down
into tears neither mask nor disclose my
world shrank. Blurred body is not a neutral
vessel controlled, sanitized, tamed
mother to be mother in mourning both.

Spectacular bodies labo[r] forth.

– From Julia H. Chang (2016)
*Sarah Ahmed (2017) cited in Chang

First day of 7th grade

Quick rolling-to-the-curb kiss, up the path
loping cool-kid strut atop signature mismatched socks.
Untethered, he floats further and further.
He hides, rolls his eyes, preteen (re)version of the terrible twos,
leaping, bounding, becoming a man and it breaks my heart,
my concentration, like endless questions from the teeny voice
in the backseat driving me mad, desperate for silence
to rest, to think. Now longing to cling, to clutch, inhale him.

Have I squandered it, the closeness, with my choices? Dis-tractions.
Dissertating baby! Mommy's working, writing.
Dr.'s bathing, rocking, changing, pinning
my identity, where? Resigned to live with longing…
Honk! Blink. Pull away from the dawdling serpent

of cars, crawling, ripping
the chord like Velcro on kindergarten kicks.
He doesn't look back.

– Author-generated poem

Keep a Family Running

I should have written today; I didn't.
I feel guilty but I was running errands,
folding laundry, all these things...

Last night, not a pair of underwear in sight.
Go to the laundry, get the basket, search.
In the very bottom. One pair. So…

I feel bad. I did not write today.
There were other things.

– From Elizabeth's 2021 interview transcript

To Become a Target

Not interested in access,
membership in this cultural disaster.
I know a black hole behind a country-club
façade when I see one.

– From Ariel Gore (2016)

But Who's the Real Mother[scholar]?

Only one? Brown hair, long fingers.
You hold, *you* comfort, blur me out
so you can be seen.

There can be two Moms.
Our family is two Moms.
If I die, she stays with her Mom.

But, it gets better (lol, classic gay).
Finally marry, ~~being able~~ having
to adopt her own kid.

Still see soft edges, more detail,
more definition now. She
less of a mother?

Do I count? She is *the real*
scholar—PhD, publications, title.
Shit. Did I just ask
"But who is *the real* motherscholar"?

– Remix of a poem a friend/colleague
from the motherscholar group wrote for
our 2022 NCORE presentation

A Mother's Work

Be a good mother, that's all—like Skywoman
maybe, cobbled together tree forts
in the maples, fixing the pond for my kids.
Skimming? Useless. Addressing only symptoms
of scum, dredge up muck, cart it away
like trying to catch wind in a butterfly net.
A good mother does not drown, driven by
a motherly urge to make a swimmable
pond raker, tadpole plucker, mesh of algae.
Predaceous diving beetles, sharp black mandibles,
small fish, dragonfly larvae, teeming with
copepods, daphnia, whirling rotifers.
A theoretical matter? True. Practical level? Murky.
Spiritual and pragmatic bumping heads,
beautiful nest, cup woven sweetly, marvel:
Homemaking. What does a good mother do?
Life adds up, eutrophic. Disintegrate to
set them free, fabric rewoven?
Balance is not a passive resting place, giving
taking, raking out, putting in,
skating in winter,
peepers in spring
summer sunbathing

autumn bonfires
hours stretched into years, lives
entwined.
Changing roles of women spiral through phases,
life like changing face of the moon circle,
wider than our own, sphere beyond.
Little pond spill over, caregiving other waters
everybody lives down stream—
brook, creek, needful lake.
Shed tears, good mother, creat[e] a home
where life's beings can flourish
grandchildren
frog children
nestlings
goslings
seedlings
spores.

– From Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013)

Hallmark of Black Academics

A Black woman in negotiations
elderly dependent, not just me
anymore, bachelorette pad
secure place, Mom,
adamant about that.

Jim Crow ethos, white folks
straight up see an
uppity negro,
how dare you,
uppity negro ask for
what you are worth? Mom

moving in today from
today on
together.

– From Sadie's 2021 transcript

Spiritual Strivings

feminist and artistic
spirituality as transformational
possibility in academic life

live and work in contexts dominated by
western-white-male-capitalistic-hegemony
hope attune to mind, spiritual reservoirs
transform these lives into tools of service
for life itself.

– From Cynthia B. Dillard (2006)

Lost Illusions

I could do *all* the projects
So much time. Pursue all these seeds…
No illusions anymore.

Pandemic. Pregnant. Twins and a toddler.
Not a complaint. Just a reality.
A lovely reality. Also, I'm terrified.

Don't have tenure, about to have
three kids under two. If I had
time and energy and space

I could do it.
Hard time remembering
last time I had energy.
And it's on a clock. *If*
it's gonna happen,
it's gonna happen
when I have little kids.

We need me to keep my job. Also
sense of self. Worked really hard
for a really long time. For that
not to work out crushing.

– From Betty's 2021 transcript

Vision of a Mama

fist in the air
baby on your back
climb mountains
paint murals

– Loretta J. Ross (2016)

Write Bold

Working mother, pandemic,
things to say, [no] time to write them.

Had a baby
cookingcleaninglaundry
just so much
writing pushed to the side.

Raw, wrong to complain.
I chose this **Write** bold.
Imposter Syndrome? Always.
Virus-triggered relapse.

I hear: *I've written so much!*
Unexpected sabbatical!
How lovely for you,
surging ahead.

Just ~~trying~~ to keep
everybody alive and sane
doesn't even...

– From Elizabeth's 2021 interview transcript

Birth Song

January. Pregnant. Eighteen.
Gramma cried. *Not you.* Almost
not a teen (mother).

Pregnancy harrowing emotionally
devastating, single mother suspended

reality floating time of pain, torment
wonder. Gramma died, paths crossed
to and from existence.

Space to nest, to hide, to heal. Queer
cousin and strong womanist friends.
Big lecture halls even bigger belly
waddled, swollen fear, pity, disgust.
Malcriado.

Trickle by trickle women arrived.
Prayer, song, energy, relief. Power
and endurance and love born
baby girl empowered blessed.
New momma with a love and
a vision.

– From Aja Y. Martinez (2020)

Three Blows

April, my father, process of passing, died,
pandemic, back to bury him. Son diagnosed,
communication disorder, hard for somebody
whose trade is language.

Crying all the time, not functional, looked
around and realized I need help. Over the edge,
not thinking rationally anymore.
Pretty dark months.

Breakdown, couldn't stop screaming,
crying. Kids at school, but not good,
always been able to trust my brain.
Still a rut in my head.

At the same time, started job as Chair.
Directing program, making curriculum.
Too much. Rough year. Well shit.
Mid-career.

And in the midst husband horrifically depressed.
Sitting, staring at the wall, crying. Bad.
Stiff upper lip, don't ask for help. Physically
bring him to psychiatrist, cash only.

Homeschooling the kids. First grade,
algebra, Pythagorean theorem, finished
Harry Potter, 7 year[s] old. I did that.
Five hours a day, reading, talking, working.

Mental and emotional energy researching
how to help them. Dealing with graduate
students' mental health. Drowning.
Who uses other hands to write.

– From Victoria's 2022 interview transcript

Mothers on Mute

Muted, sidelined. All the same
mind racing, inequities visible
to all but those who choose
to stay blind. Writing ever more
urgent oppressive compulsion
to have domestic chores done
before she sits to write, effective
way to steal her voice.

Brought to my knees.
How many dishes?
How much laundry? And
So. Much. Clutter.
Disorder of home
disorder of thoughts linked.
Like pins in a doll, I clean
taming my cluttered mind.

Writing: font of liberation.
Pandemic left me so parched
I will guzzle any water I find.

Day in and day out, unheard.

Whittled away by domestic
responsibilities, my authorial
voice is changing. If I waited
to produce something beautiful,
I would have nothing.

Fissures in the foundation
papered over. Leaning in falling
through the cracks, anxiety creeps.
Entire days unable to find a word
dances just beyond my grasp.
Nursery rhymes play on endless
loop in my brain, relapse.

Motherhood compounded,
mothers struggling, mourning
what might have been, people
counting on me to unmute.

– From Lauren Miller Griffith (2021)

Frenetic

i'm just trying ... i just keep saying yes and yes, and yes, and yes, and yes to everything a new project just came up three days ago and i'm looking like i might be involved with that and then i'm in the middle of ... and i do the same, it's not just other people contacting me, it's me just thinking of more things and then, pretty soon, i'm running down that rabbit hole and so, i don't know that i'm handling ... i don't know how i'm making decisions i just keep piling it on i don't feel I'm coalescing in this higher ed writing world you're supposed to have a way that you're going and what you're known for, or something i don't really know exactly what that all means, but...

I come to work, better if I leave,
but then, I'm not with him, so
I'm torn. I love my job. But…
in the ultimate grand scheme
of things not important.

My son is important.

… so, i'm all over the place just everything, i can't even tell you how many ... i *can* tell you i could list … that's not even everything that's just to begin … and i have no idea what normal people do, but to me, that doesn't feel ... i'm not even sure i'm on a good pace i might be going really slow i don't really know so what it's all gonna mean in the end at the end of it all do i look and see my list and will i feel valuable

– From Estella's 2021 interview transcript

Work Ethic

Day and night
Working and working
Day and night
Writing and rewriting
Day and night
Until I get it right

– Gabe Doughty,[14] my son, 12 years old (2021)

Bounce

Life for the next decade with younger children
Wish I could have deep thoughts
Then make waffles
Then get back to deep thoughts

– From Elizabeth's 2020 interview transcript

Keeping Time: Notes from Drum Practice

Where are the accented triplets?
Does this page look familiar? No?
The ostinato, a motif persistently repeated,
same musical voice.

It's called "comping," adding to the standard ride beat
boom, boom, bat, boom-boom, bop
Left hand plays notes around the ride, accompanying cacophony
two and three and four and

14. Published with permission.

compliments the other instruments. Hear the cymbals?
Crash! Do, blop, do-do, blop
Tempo zipping past, keep up, keep time, keep going
Hit the high hat, ride the floor tom, groove
You come in on beat 8, then on beat 1 … see? How that happens.
Da-da-da foom, da-da-do-do-dum
Harmonic and percussive, rosewood claves make a chamber, sound
Depends how much you choke the stick—
Bum, bum, bum, bum-bum, Woo!
Clave rhythm dressed up and placed in a pile of triplets

Full rest there.

– Author-generated poem, 2021

Genesis
Stories don't just tell us
who we are…
blueprint for responsibility
to ourself and others.

– Alexi Rocha & Ryan Skinnell (2021)

Constellating Insight Through the Radical Specificity of Cluster Poetry

Rather than crystalize the "essence" of motherscholaring, my poetry cluster constellates an array of lived moments and ideas that converge and diverge bricolage-style, inviting readers to tinker with disparate elements and piece together generative spaces of possibility (Howard et al., 2023). Constellating meaning is a practice of relationality and accountability, worldviews and approaches to knowledge making central to cultural rhetorics and Indigenous research/writing paradigms (Hidalgo et al., 2021; Kovach, 2009; Riley-Mukavetz, 2020; Simpson, 2017; Wieser-Weryackwe, 2023, Wilson, 2008). From the perspective of Nishnaabeg thought, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) explains that "constellations exist only in the context of relationships; otherwise they are just individual stars" (p. 215). Only collectively do stars become "beacons of light that work together to create doorways … into other worlds" to "reveal theory, story, and knowledge" (Simpson, 2017, p. 212). As Houser and Özyeşilpınar (2024) demonstrate in their examination of how religious systems perpetuate misogyny, constellation can be a "performative-reflective-embodied writing methodology" that uses embodied storytelling to forge connection and resistance across stories,

space, and time. A constellation praxis, Wieser-Weryackwe and her colleagues (2023) elaborate, involves "examining ideas and stories in a piece of scholarship based on their relationships to one another and on making new knowledge/s in those in-between spaces or liminal zones that are always ripe with change" (p. 6). Writing and interpreting cluster poetry is an act of constellation, forging ever expanding webs of meaning-in-relation.

Theorizing Indigenous poetics, contributors to Neal McLeod's (2014) collection allude to the ways poetry lends itself to the praxis of constellation. For example, in his contribution to the collection, Sam McKegney (2014), a settler scholar of Indigenous literature who grew up in Anishinaabe territory on the Saugeen Peninsula, describes "the act of reading, listening to, and interpreting Indigenous poetry" as a process by which "the meanings of words and lines and stories inevitably multiply as they collide with the thoughts, memories, and spirits of audience members, who perform acts of translation through engaged listening" (p. 44). Each poem in my cluster represents an individual story, and meaning constellates across, around, and through them. The poems "mean" in relationship with each other and in relation with the in-between "dark spaces" (Schoone, 2020, p. 40) that set them apart. Readers are invited to play an active role in meaning making, to enter into "critical alliance" (McKegney, 2014, p. 51) with the poetic constellation, resisting the urge to "obligatorily endorse" (p. 52) every story, experience or point of view they encounter and opening themselves up to "a ritual of cataclysmic engagement" (p. 52). Readers of all kinds, whether mothers and scholars or not, breathe meaning from and into my poetic engagement with motherscholaring.

Constellation is not only about relationality, but also "relational accountability," demonstrating respect, reciprocity and responsibility in the act of meaning making (Wilson, 2008, p. 11). In the case of my poetry cluster, relational accountability means respecting the lives and perspectives of the motherscholars represented in found poems created from source texts, even when (especially when) they are different from my own. It means reciprocating the vulnerability of the humans whose lives I poetically rendered by including my own self-generated poems to place my-"self-in-relation" (Graveline cited in Kovach 2009, p. 14). It means taking seriously my responsibility to be critically reflexive about whose realities I sought out and found worthy of representing and, by extension, what meanings I make possible (or not) with the particular poems I clustered. It means embracing constellation not as a tool but as a way of being and coming to know that transforms the process and possible meanings to be made.

Divergence is essential for constellating meaning, for "our differences, too, teach us" (Wieser-Weryackwe et al., 2023, p. 13). As Houser and Özyeşilpınar (2024) point out, by revealing shared experience and simultaneously acknowledging and respecting difference, constellation resists "a totalizing gaze," offering instead "small windows" into myriad lived experiences and their unique "rhetorical and material consequences." In other words, constellating enables radical

engagement with difference. Instead of triangulating what is recognizable or shared in common, constellating honors the specificity of experience. In the case of my cluster poetry, each poem, each star, eschews inherent significance; the specificity of each poem evokes a multitude of potential meanings that emerge only in relation to the radical specificity of other poem-stars and the countless "lines of flight" (Sotirin, 2010) that exist between them. The uncertainty of meaning creates opportunities to disrupt truisms, assumed commonalities, and connections in favor of new ways of thinking, being, and relating. Through "personal, historical, and cultural differences" observes Rachel C. Jackson (Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma), "unexpected solidarity" can emerge (Wieser-Weryackwe et al., 2023, p. 10). Stories will come together to make meaning, she holds, "even if (and as) they diverge" (p. 11). Houser and Özyeşilpınar (2024) call this "the rhetorical power of relationality" cultivated through constellation, a power that reaches beyond individual stories alone.

As a researcher and faculty writer experiencing academic motherhood, clustering poems around motherscholaring is an act of constellation that allows me to inhabit, and invite readers to inhabit, what Howard et al. (2023) call the living theory, or "soulwork" (p. 596) of this ever-shifting identity- and community-forging process and to discover new insights. In what follows, I sketch out several constellations that might be traced through my poetry cluster as a way of demonstrating what cluster poetry can do. Readers will no doubt see other potential paths or ways of drawing connections and juxtaposing divergences that lead to different shapes, patterns, and insights. Poetry clusters are ripe for this kind of recursive, expansive, meandering meaning making. The constellations I trace are inspired by themes Howard et al. (2023) identified as central to their understanding of motherscholaring as both a process and identity. These themes stoked my curiosity and launched me into scholarship on mothering and academic motherhood which inspired many of the literature-voiced poems included above. I use them here to highlight possible patterns in the stars, so to speak, ways of tracking ideas through certain groupings or constellations of poems within the larger cluster. Themes include motherscholaring as risky community, defiant learning, epistemology, accountability, and representation of scholarly thought (Howard et al., 2023).

One constellation of poems I might trace through my cluster explores the reality that mothering is risky work in scholarly communities where our identities as mother and scholar are continuously cleaved. I borrow the word "cleave" from Howard et al. (2023) who describe "academic spaces that cleave us into fragments of mother space, scholar space" (p. 599). The dual meanings of cleave[15] seem particularly apt for capturing the lived paradox of a motherscholar identity. Cleave means to cut, split or sever; it can also mean to stick, adhere or cling. Just

15. Thanks to Julie Ward, friend, colleague, scholar, poet, and research participant for pointing out the rich double meaning of "cleave" as apt description for the paradox of motherscholaring.

as identities of mother and scholar can feel conflicting, even antithetical in academic environments, they are also inseparable and for me at least reciprocal and often mutually sustaining. "Against the backdrop of academia," Howard and her colleagues (2023) lament,

> where academic success is measured in impact factors and citations; where poetry is not an acceptable mode of communication; where we all, as fugitive breastfeeding mothers, had to crouch in school and university bathroom stalls to pump breastmilk for our babies, mothering and scholaring are not written together in the same paragraph, much less the same word. (p. 9)

In this context, motherscholars sustain by cleaving to "a decades-old legacy of postcolonial feminist and womanist scholars who have long theorized about mothering … as a 'revolutionary praxis'" (Howard et al., 2023, p. 596). Inspired, challenged, called out, and called in by the framework of Revolutionary Mothering (Gumbs et al., 2016), I crafted literature-voiced poems from the collection including "Vision of a Mama" and "On the Front Lines." Considering those poems along with my found poem "How to Make a Tenure Case" and generated poem "Kids Welcome" creates a constellation that grapples with the meaning and stakes of risk and resistance for white academic mothers like me, living relatively comfortably with basic needs met, for motherscholars suffering daily racism and oppression in flawed systems of higher education, and for mothers within and beyond academia surviving mortal peril, risking life and limb to mother in the face of grave violence.

A second constellation one might trace through my cluster encircles the idea of motherscholaring as a "living theory of defiant learning," wherein our "motherfull identities … [are] connected to our spiritual selves, which are too often left outside academe" (Howard et al., 2023, p. 599). This grouping considers what it means to inhabit a motherfull identity, to be in "critical and caring relationships" (Hardee & Thompson, 2020, as cited in Howard et al., 2023, p. 599) with others who long for wholeness "in the face of academic spaces that cleave us into fragments" (Howard et al., 2023, p. 599). When creating the larger poetry cluster of which this constellation is a part, I wrestled with whether to include poems written from interviews with faculty writers who did not identify as mothers. Ultimately, I decided to include "Hallmark of Black Academics," from an interview with Sadie in which she reflected on the process of negotiating the terms of a new faculty position as a Black woman newly responsible for her ageing mother; "Default Option," created with permission from an essay written by a writer in my study, Julie, about what it is like to be a woman who decided not to have children; and "Work Ethic," a poem written by my son, Gabe. I included them because they force me to reflect on ways that my motherscholar identity can sometimes be rooted in indignation about my own self-perceived suffering in ways that foreclose opportunities for community and coalition building with

others shouldering needless adversity at the hands of the same oppressive system I rage against. Including them now in this constellation along with "Spiritual Strivings" and "Unfold *Only* in the Sharing" from Cynthia B. Dillard's (2006) *On Spiritual Strivings: Transforming an African American Woman's Academic Life*, I see the connection between motherfull-ness and spirituality and the value of radical specificity that embraces resonant dissonance in order to attest to "unfolding possibilities" (Sotirin, 2010).

Yet another constellation to be traced through my poetry cluster illuminates the epistemological nature of motherscholaring. It matters whose voices, experiences, and material realities contribute to understandings of motherscholaring, from whose lives we theorize and make sense of motherscholarling as process and positionality (Howard et al., 2023). I am aware of my privilege and responsibility as I struggle to raise a cisgendered white boy and theorize motherscholaring through my writing and research; I realize that of the participants who remained in my study, no mother identified as a person of color; and I acknowledge that I am drawn to stories in my data that depict white, middle-class academic motherhood. With these ideas in mind, I trace a constellation through "Spectacular Bodies" from Julia H. Chang's (2020) same-titled chapter in *Presumed Incompetent II*, "Birth Song" from the epilogue of Aja Y. Martinez's (2020) *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory*, "Hallmark of Black Academics" about a Black daughter negotiating elder care for her ageing mother, "To Become a Target" from Ariel Gore's (2016) chapter "Queering Family" in *Revolutionary Mothering* about resisting what can become a cult of (white, heterosexual, middle class) motherhood, and "But Who's the Real Mother[scholar]?" written by a friend and colleague wrestling with what it means to claim the identity of mother and scholar in the context of her non-normative family dynamic. This grouping fuels my commitment to resist epistemic injustice, account for my privilege, and actively seek out and honor lived experiences different from my own, especially those that have been minoritized and historically excluded.

The theme of accountability reminds me of a conversation about collective resilience we had in the motherscholaring group on my campus wherein a colleague reflected on the chapter in Robin Wall Kimmerer's (2013) book *Braiding Sweetgrass* about nurturing a sustainable pond as a form of mothering creatures and ecologies of the future. My found poem "A Mother's Work" from Kimmerer's chapter with the same name was inspired by that conversation and might form a constellation with poems such as "Indulgence," about how an academic culture of productivity teaches us to treat as indulgent caring for tired, sick bodies and minds, "Keep a Family Running," about the raw guilt of not writing in order to attend to "other things," "Lost Illusions," about tempering expectations and reconsidering a sense of self tethered to dogged accomplishment at all costs, and "Genesis," a meta-reflexive poem suggesting that the radical specificity in the cluster might enact a form of mutual accountability, care, and relational reciprocity.

A final constellation I see in this cluster poem encircles Howard et al.'s (2023) claim that motherscholaring represents scholarly thought and thus "ignites, expands, and deepens conversations about the relationship between maternal identity and scholarship" (p. 600). In particular, the following poems constellate this theme: "Mothers on Mute," from anthropologist Lauren Miller's article with the same name about mothering during the pandemic; "Bounce," which captures the visceral frustration of identities divided; "Write Bold" and "Frenetic" that reveal the torn-ness and chaos of living cleaved lives; "Three Blows" and "Hobbling Along" about the toll of mental health crises and the paralyzing fear that accompanies loss of control—over time, attention, emotion, brain, and body; and "Spectacular Bodies," which "interrogat[es] the thorniness of visibility" for scholars of color (Chang, 2020, p. 259). I would include in this constellation Gabe's poem "Work Ethic" and my poems "First Day of 7th Grade," "Keeping Time," and "For G" as well, for they are my attempt at "embodied theorizing that moves against the normative and conventional demands of binary mother and scholar" (Howard et al., 2023, p. 600)—my move to embrace motherscholaring as "a form of self-authorship" of "writing [myself] into visibility" (Howard et al., 2023, p. 600) always with a critical awareness of the hypervisibility bestowed by whiteness upon motherscholars of color (Chang, 2020).

Writing this poetry cluster and tracing these constellations has cultivated in me a reinvigorated, critically hopeful, ever-evolving sense of myself as a faculty writer and motherscholar, a relational sense that shifts, turns, and transforms each time I read the poems, discovering new constellations and possibilities. I focused on motherscholaring in this chapter, but I can imagine many other focal points around which I could have composed poetry clusters—uses of anger in faculty writing lives, the psychosomatic effects of forging a writing life in toxic academic culture, lived experiences of the mental health crises endured by writers and their loved ones. Researchers studying different populations in different contexts with various study parameters could no doubt identify countless other touchstones. As I hope I've made clear, cluster poetry is a promising "misfit" tool (Restaino, 2019, p. 85) for disrupting common understandings based on generalities and recognizable experiences related not only to motherscholaring but to writing, writers, and humans in a range of contexts.

Ideal for researchers aiming for radical specificity, who want to "evok[e] emotional response and resonance and promot[e] critical self-reflexivity about not only daily events but their larger political and cultural significances" (Sotirin, 2010), creating cluster poetry is perfect for probing any complex phenomenon, experience, narrative, or trope that resists coherent representation. Through radical specificity, poetry clusters animate what cannot be easily represented, puncturing normative, normalizing accounts and holding space for myriad ways of knowing, being, and doing. Gathering lived experiences (both resonant and dissonant) that are "in tension with the cultural scripts, material forces, and historical contingencies that shape our personal selves," poetry clusters uniquely

"display existential disruption, self-questioning, and the exploration of lived possibilities and constraints" to "affect an intimate political analysis" (Sotirin, 2010). The critical, justice-oriented method enables researchers and inspires readers to constellate—to connect and reconnect the "shining parts" (Schoone, 2020, p. 40), to notice different parts gleaming or fading into the background, like different takes on a Rorschach inkblot. In doing so, it cultivates "compassionate knowledge about [both] the constraints and possibilities of our own and others' lives" (Sotirin, 2010). In this way, by evoking radical specificity, poetry clusters constellate new meanings and reveal insights undiscoverable through any other means.

Chapter 3. Juxtaposing Poetic Inquiry Practices for Deep Listening

This chapter offers three related approaches to poetic inquiry that enact a praxis of deep listening in qualitative research. In the other chapters of this book I implicitly suggest the value of poetic inquiry for listening to qualitative data—listening for the relationship between the one voice and the many through composite poetry, listening to cultivate mutual vulnerability and collaborative meaning making through tandem found poetry, and listening for the constellated insights that emerge in poetry clusters. Here, I consider three new types of inquiry—profile poetry, reverse interview poetry, and I-poems—each of which enacts a different kind of listening, a unique "angle of understanding" from which to interpret and make meaning (Edwards & Weller, 2012, p. 216). Social science researchers Rosalind Edwards and Susie Weller (2012) explain that any approach to data analysis constructs an "analytic mode of being" for the researcher in relationship to research subjects and data (p. 214). Considering different analytical approaches alongside one another throws into relief the distinct modes or angles of sense-making they engender. Taken together, different angles of understanding create opportunities for deep listening, for listening across relational orientations and ways of knowing. Inspired by Edwards and Weller (2012), I juxtapose three types of poetic inquiry to draw attention to varying "analytic ontologies" (p. 216), ways of knowing, being, and doing in the midst of qualitative research, so as to provocatively trouble tendencies to value and seek certainty and stability in who we are, who we know, and what we find through our research. I highlight the effect of juxtaposing ways of deep listening to signal the intentionality of the practice and its relationship to feminist research commitments.

The praxis of listening—the rigorous, recursive, reflexive effort to understand with "greater precision and compassion" (Rosenberg & Howes, 2018, p. 76) the positions, perspectives, stories and experiences of research participants—has a long tradition in feminist-relational research (see also Boehr, 2021). Feminist researchers embrace listening as a critical praxis that resists dominant logics, hierarchies and power dynamics that have traditionally defined research relationships and methodologies. For example, in Lauren Rosenberg's (2015) ethnographic work, listening manifests as "mutual contemplation" (p. 57) as she seeks input based on the knowledge and experience of participants while working through data (see also Rosenberg & Howes, 2018, p. 81). Relatedly, archival researcher Emma Howes describes her listening process as "more a matter of reflection and reevaluation" while immersed in archival material (Rosenberg & Howes, 2018, p. 81). Both Rosenberg and Howes (2018) link listening to a feminist ethos informed by relationships with participants, by what they see and hear in their research, and by "what may remain more opaque" (p. 77). No matter

the approach, a critical listening praxis is rooted in feminist-relational commitments to acknowledge how subjectivities, biases, and ideological lenses inform research practices—how researchers conduct interviews, interpret and analyze transcripts, represent findings, and make meaning with and from participants' words and stories (Boehr, 2021; Rosenberg & Howes, 2018).

Feminist researchers, and I count myself among them, listen to remain alert to our own positionality, how our own experiences, needs, and perspectives orient us to participants and their stories, as well as to changes and continuities in participants' sense of self over time. We listen to trouble static notions of narrative, knowledge, self, truth, and meaning making. In this chapter, I show how juxtaposing particular types of poetic inquiry can enact feminist listening praxis in ways that have not been fully explored in writing studies research. Writing researchers grappling with the following questions might find valuable the poetic methods in this chapter and the deep listening their juxtaposition makes possible:

- How do I stay accountable to those experiences traditional research tools are most likely to miss or flatten?
- How do I acknowledge my entanglement with dominant ideologies and (re)orient to my work in the spirit of knowing, being, and doing differently?
- How might I orient to my work not as an objective analyst, but as a "vulnerable observer" (Behar, 1996) immersed in the process?
- How can I center relationships (with scholars/scholarship, research participants, self and readers) as both the foundation and goal for my research and writing?

In what follows, I demonstrate the potential of profile poems, reverse interview poems, and I-poems to engage these questions through deep listening.

Scaffolding Deep Listening Through Poetic Inquiry: The Listening Guide

To emphasize their relationship and the value of their juxtaposition, I explain below the three approaches to poetic inquiry as they relate to Carol Gilligan's (2015) Listening Guide (LG). The LG was originally designed in the 1980s during Gilligan's research on women's identity and moral development as "a method of psychological analysis that draws on voice, resonance, and relationship as ports of entry into the human psyche" (Gilligan et al., 2006, p. 253). The guide has since been used to study a range of phenomena in psychology and in other contexts as well. Lori E. Koelsch (2015) used the LG to analyze interviews with college-aged women regarding unlabeled sexual experiences, for example, and Chinyere Elsie Ajayi and Sunday Ajayi (2023) used it in their research on women's experiences living with female genital mutilation. In writing studies, Christiane Boehr (2021) used the LG as part of her case study on women writing in community. She explains how the guide scaffolded "rigorous, associative

listening practices" through which she was able to "create a holistic portrayal of participants and sustain a respectful, power-sharing ethos" that involved re-thinking positionality, questioning preconceived notions, and checking associations in an effort to "remain open and connected…to different truths as a manifestation of respect."

Lynn Sorsoli and Deborah L. Tolman (2008) emphasize the value of the LG for recognizing multiplicity and movement in interview data. In their studies of the sexual experiences of adolescent girls and the struggles female survivors narrate around decisions to disclose experiences of sexual abuse, the LG allows them to listen for multiple, overlapping, sometimes contradictory voices of participants in order to nuance and even productively agitate understandings of how participants make sense of their lived experience. Lisa A. Mazzei might call this way of paying attention "troubled listening" (Mazzei, 2007, p. 110), a way of "listen[ing] at the limit of voice" (Mazzei, 2009, p. 52), of attending to silence as an "absent presence" (Mazzei, 2007, p. 27) that may reveal "those narratives that have previously gone unnamed, unnoticed, and unthought" (Mazzei, 2009, p. 52). Mazzei's (2007) poetic understanding of silence as space ripe for listening, as inhabited—with life, with breath, with meaning—reinforces the value of poetic inquiry for deep listening. Citing poets such as Rumi, Gerald Stern and Briget Peegan Kelly, Mazzei (2007) explains how the heartbeat of poems can often be found "in the breath, the pauses, or the unwritten cadences" (p. 36). Likewise, the meaningful silences of research participants may contain multitudes if we learn to listen for them. Listening for silence—participants' loaded silences and our own—prompts researchers to "investigate how we perpetuate sameness, hegemony, or privilege" in what/how we (fail) to voice and listen (Mazzei, 2007, p. 51). The LG is a perfect scaffold for "troubled listening" (Mazzei, 2007, p. 110), for multiplicity and absence, movement and "inhabited silence" (Mazzei, 2007). As part of a feminist research praxis, the LG offers a systematic way of attending to narrative as a form of meaning making in qualitative research and remaining critically aware of how power dynamics in research relationships influence whose truths are voiced.

The LG method involves four rounds of listening to data, as described by Gilligan et al. (2006), "each designed to bring the researcher into relationship with a person's distinct and multilayered voice by tuning in or listening to distinct aspects of a person's expression of her or his [sic] experience within a particular relational context" (p. 255). The first round involves listening for the "plot" of the interview, the lay of the land, the main stories that emerge in conversation with a participant, as well as for the listener's response to the interview (Gilligan et al., 2006, p. 257). The second round focuses on the speaker's first-person voice in order to discover how the person speaks about themselves; the goal of this round is for the researcher to come into relationship with the participant, to tune into what they know of themselves before attempting to write about or interpret their experiences (Gilligan et al., 2006).

The third and fourth rounds, as described by Gilligan et al. (2006) bring the focus back to the research question, first by listening for "multiple facets" or layers of a participant's expressed experiences and highlighting counterpoints between voices and finally pulling together all that has been learned about the research participant as it bears on the research question (p. 262). The LG scaffolds a relational method for "discovery research" for "intentionally bring[ing] the researcher into relationship with the participant through making our responses, experiences, and interpretive lenses explicit in the process, and by listening to [the] participant's first-person voice before moving in to listen for answers to our own research questions" (Gilligan et al., 2006, p. 267). The method is flexible and associative and worth experimenting with for researchers seeking relational approaches to qualitative research that feature deep listening and recursive, reflexive meaning making.

For the purposes of this chapter, I focus on the first two rounds—orienting to main stories told and tuning into the I voice—because they offer me, as a researcher, "a way of opening [myself] to the experience of another that enhances the prospect for discovery" in ways that highlight the potential of poetic inquiry to facilitate deep listening (Gilligan, 2015, p. 75). Adding layers of recursiveness and homing in on the original research question, rounds three and four offer additional scaffolds for deepening analysis. I can imagine using them to experiment further with affordances of poetic inquiry for coalescing insights about faculty writing lives, and I encourage writing researchers to try incorporating them into a deep listening praxis. However, in order to fully probe the potential of three types of poetic inquiry in the space of this chapter, I stick to the first two rounds of the LG, as represented in Table 3.1.

Loosely following the framework for each round of the LG, I consider two types of poetic inquiry in the context of round one and a third type of poetic inquiry as it relates to round two. First I show how profile poems, poems created from the words of a single participant, can be used to crystalize main stories and capture the landscape of an interview. I then pair a profile poem with a poem composed through the process of reverse interviewing (Restaino, n.d.), a procedure that involves re-listening to an interview recording and creating what Restaino (n.d.) calls a "reactive text" or set of notes that chart my emotive reactions, hesitations, and/or moments of uncertainty while listening. My approach is modeled after Restaino's (2019) effort to enact feminist practices of reflexivity, reciprocity, and humility in the collaborative ethnographic project she completed with her friend Susan Lundy Maute as Maute was living and dying with terminal cancer. Creating poetry from the reflexive process of reverse interviewing enacts a second aspect of round one of the listening guide, acknowledging my "social location in relation to the participant, the nature of our relationship… and [my] emotional responses" (Gilligan et al., 2006, p. 257) to the stories she shared during and after our interview.

Table 3.1 Listening Guide as a Scaffold for Deep Listening Through Poetic Inquiry

Round 1: Landscape			**Round 2: I Voice**	
Part 1	Main Stories	Profile Poem	Participant's Sense of Self	I-Poems
Part 2	Researcher Response	Found Poem from Reactive Text		

The pairing of the two poems—the profile poem and the reverse interview poem—enacts the reflexive practice at the heart of the first round in the LG, the goal of which is to lay bare the researcher's social location in relation to the participant. The pairing poetically reveals points of dis/connection, shows how the researcher is touched or not by the narrative, and identifies thoughts and feelings surfaced during and after the interview. It invites researchers like me to listen to ourselves listening, to ponder and lay bare our reactions and to interrogate how our reactions shape our understanding of participants and their stories, how we orient to the research itself (Gilligan et al., 2006).

Next, following round two of the LG, I create what Elizabeth Debold calls "I-poems" (Debold, 1990, as cited in Gilligan et al., 2006, p. 259) from a single participant's interview transcripts collected over six years. Pivoting from the first round focusing on my reflexive engagement with interview material, I appreciate how the creation of I-poems "tunes the ear of the researcher to the voice of the other and specifically the 'I,' the first-person voice as it speaks of acting and being in the world" (Gilligan, 2015, p. 71). I-poems are created by identifying every "I" statement in a given passage of transcript and listing them down the page in the order of appearance. "I" statements typically involve the pronoun and verb with or without the object; researchers usually decide "the run of words" to include based on what seems important to understanding the interviewee's sense of self (Edwards & Weller, 2012, p. 205). Each "I" statement is placed "on a separate line, like lines of a poem," creating a poetic "free-fall of association" (Gilligan et al., 2006, p. 260). The I-poem presents a "stream of consciousness carried by a firstperson [sic] voice, cutting across or running through a narrative rather than being contained by the structure of full sentences" (Gilligan et al., 2006, p. 260), attending to how a person speaks of themselves as opposed to the stories they tell. The process of creating I-poems creates space between the participant's and the analyst's perceptions, a pause for listening before interpretation (Edwards & Weller, 2012).

Edwards and Weller (2012) reiterate the value of creating I-poems for tracking continuity and change in subjectivities over time. They used the I-poem method of analysis with qualitative case study material from their research on how sibling and friendship relationships of children and young people relate to their senses of self over time. They interviewed over 50 participants three times each in designated age ranges over seven years in order to understand how their identities flowed from proscribed and chosen "relationships across the lifecourse"

(Edwards & Weller, 2012, p. 204). They used I-poems to trace the changing subjectivities of a participant, Anne, as her sense of self in relation to her older sister shifted over the years, as represented by the evolution of voices from "little sister" to "nostalgic" to "naughty" (Edwards & Weller, 2012, pp. 211-214). As they point out, I-poems don't necessarily provide objective access to participants' authentic selves apart from researcher subjectivity, but the listening process they inspire propels researchers into a position that "stand[s] alongside" (Edwards & Weller, 2012, p. 212) rather than gazes upon the participant. The difference is between interpreting a participant's sense of self and interpreting how the participant perceives their sense of self and standing alongside them as those senses persist or evolve over time.

In this chapter, I share I-poems created from passages near the end of six of Mandy's interviews in which she reflects on herself as a writer. Often the passages capture Mandy's response to a question I asked all participants in almost every interview: *How would you describe yourself as writer in this moment? Finish the statement: I am a writer who….* Creating I-poems from each interview allows me to consider shifts and consistencies in Mandy's perception of her sense of self as a writer and person. All three types of poems in this chapter are based on transcripts from Mandy's interviews to emphasize how they work differently and in tandem to help me engage with and represent data from multiple dimensions.

I chose to focus on Mandy because the body/mind/spirit relationship was so prominent in our interviews, a relationship I saw as an occasion (Sullivan, 2009) for poetic engagement. Mental health struggles emerged early as a significant component in her lived experience as a writer, and I was drawn to the profile poem as a way to map the landscape of this experiential dimension. Moreover, Mandy's talk about her mental health struggles featured visceral imagery and provocative metaphors; it was rife with "contradictions and absences" (Gilligan et al., 2006, p. 257). The mind/body/spirit dynamic loomed large in my interactions with Mandy; her body was palpably present in the stories she shared, especially in her breath, snot, saliva, and tears. In other words, her data was ripe for poetic representation. Composing a found poem from the "reactive text" (Restaino, n.d.) I created during the reverse interview process gave me a way to reckon with the roles our bodies played in our interviews and how I engaged as a researcher, friend, and faculty writer myself with Mandy's visible, visceral expressions of emotion and experiences with mental health.

The juxtaposition of the three poetic approaches to engaging with data from the same participant highlights how each approach offers a different type of listening, a different "angle of understanding" (Edwards & Weller, 2012, p. 216), that when compared foster a deep listening praxis. Edwards & Weller (2012) make a similar move when they compare a thematic analysis and an I-poem analysis of data from their participant Anne. As in their case, the contrast I make drives home how each poetic approach orients me, as a researcher, differently to Mandy and to the questions at the heart of my research study. Moreover it underscores

for qualitative researchers the value in using these forms of poetic inquiry to enact a listening praxis that centers bodies, emotions, relationships, and subjectivities all in motion and in flux for the purpose of resisting certainty and stability in favor of transforming what is knowable, thinkable, possible.

Listening for the Landscape: Profile Poems (Round One, Part One)

Profile poems are a form of poetic inquiry that involves crafting found poems from the transcript(s) of a single participant to describe an aspect of their lived experience. Like a portrait of a face sketched from a particular angle, profile poems are not meant to be comprehensive but to outline the contours of a theme or pattern emerging in the data. Aligned with the first round in the LG, creating a profile poem is about tracing a plotline, listening for the landscape of an interview or set of interviews. Both involve attending to "repeated words, salient themes, striking metaphors or symbols, emotional hot-spots, gaps, or ruptures" (Gilligan, 2015, p. 71) in the data. With profile poems, words, phrases, or lines from transcripts are arranged poetically to artistically depict the landscape of a given theme as it plays out in the experience of one participant. For example, in an effort to understand experiences of trans* individuals, C. Sean Robinson (2018) created a single found research poem from an interview with a biracial, non-binary, genderqueer faculty member because it allowed him "to focus on the meaning making, emotional tensions, and vulnerability of one participant" (p. 114). In a similar vein, I created the following profile poem with transcripts from my interviews with Mandy, who was early on the tenure track at a research-focused university when she joined my study in 2016. First, I conducted a close reading of one interview extracting phrases and words that resonated with me and seemed indicative of Mandy's story as I understood it, paying particular attention to text that exploded public/private, mind/body, intellect/emotion binaries (Faulkner, 2020). I combined phrases and arranged and deleted words to create flow and rhythm.

Learning to Do Life Better

To live my life and work
but not have work erode life.
Some people, work is life;
that's not me. Or maybe …
I'm just complaining
and I shouldn't be
and everybody has to fucking work
to get tenure
maybe I haven't been working
hard enough.

In a rush
got to get it out.
Look, statistics!
Put that in.
Write about a theory,
babble on.
Talk like a researcher
to a practitioner,
they ignore you.
Talk like a practitioner
to a researcher,
they look down on you.
Translate identities,
research and practice
and practice and research.
Make it persuasive
but also academic
and empirical …
Well, shit.

The research I'm doing:
meticulous
time sucking
energy sucking
emotio[n] sucking
dreary and dragging.
Not ready.
Hyping myself up.
Describe it to readers,
make an impact,
the right message
to the right people
in the right way.

I need help,
sage advice
pull me out of my head.
I need to hear:

"hello,"
"stop being a fucking idiot"
"this is how you're going to get there" and
"it's okay."
Now I ruminate,
don't know what to do,
how to fill that gap.

I judge myself less for those days
that devastate me for weeks,
moved to days,
moved to hours.
It's gotten better over 12 years
also worse.
Complete breakdown.
Sobbing,
Xanax,
therapy.

The nature of mental health
stigma will never go away,
feels like defeat.
You're a fucking professor,
you teach therapists
to be fucking therapists,
and yet you're a fucking mess.
Surrendering
to the fact that I'm not okay.

It comes down
to learning how
to do life better,
be better
to myself
as a person.
I know this person
I want to become, and
I'm not her.
Yet.

Rendering Mandy's words poetically compels me and hopefully invites readers to listen differently, to, in the words of poet Jane Hirshfield, "enter the changed consciousness that poetry asks" (1997, p. 12). It invites us to consider assumptions and expectations about how to find meaning here, "to listen for concentration's transforming arc" (p. 12). The poem is both evocative of Mandy's lived experience and shaped by my own subjectivities; it is a type of "poetic transcription" (Leavy, 2020, p. 91) in which "the perspectives of both I and the participant are fused" (Robinson, 2018, p. 115). Experimenting with poetic transcriptions based on an interview with Dona Juana, an elderly Puerto Rican researcher and educator, Corrine Glesne (1997) discovered a "third voice" (p. 215) that was a combination of researcher and participant. I believe a third voice emerges in my profile poem, one that is not mine nor Mandy's but exists between us. According to Glense (1997), the third voice offers a unique "interpretive space" in which the separation between observer and observed "disintegrates" and new meanings emerge that nevertheless ring true (p. 215). When I shared the poem with Mandy, she responded with surprise, delight, and gratitude. "I love this poem so much," she told me. "It is a gift. To be given back my words to me, and constructed in such a meaningful way. That means so much. Thank you." Responses like these, according to Robinson (2018), are "a testament to the truths of experiences as told by [participants], as heard by [researchers], and to the manner in which those experiences are [poetically] conveyed" (p. 115). Mandy's response drives home how readers, too, are invited to join in the recursive truth finding and meaning making.

Poetic techniques capture the frenzy of Mandy's words as she described her efforts to be all things to all people. Short lines pull the eye quickly down the page, while repetition ("the right message/to the right people/in the right way," stanza 3, lines 11-13) and listing ("sobbing/Xanax/therapy," stanza 5, lines 8-10) create a choppy accumulation of demands, mounting toward a breakdown. The repetition of the word "sucking" (stanza 3, lines 3-5) emphasizes how passion can be depleting as it intensifies the urgency of the work and compounds the pressure to make an impact beyond institutional measures, to reach the communities Mandy cares so deeply about. The poem ends with Mandy's desire to "do life better" (stanza 7, line 3), underscoring the reality that Mandy's writing life is inseparable from her human life, from her journeys of becoming the scholar *and* the person she wants to be. As Robinson (2018) points out, profile poems are particularly valuable for "mirror[ing] the shifting nature of identity and the difficulty of capturing who we are and who we want to be" (p. 114). The profile poem offers a scaffold for engaging in the first part of round one of Gilligan's LG (Gilligan et al., 2006); it considers Mandy's identity development in relation to a significant aspect of her experiential landscape—living with mental health challenges as an academic.

Orienting to the Relationship: Reverse Interview Poems (Round One, Part Two)

Poetic inquiry is also ideal for embracing the second aspect of listening fostered in

round one of the LG—reflexively orienting to the participant, pondering the nature of the research relationship, and tuning into the researcher's emotional response as an interviewer and data interpreter. Poet David Whyte emphasizes the potential for facilitating this type of reflexive listening through poetry (Harris, 2021). Poetry, says Whyte, is "the art of overhearing yourself say things you didn't know you knew, that you … were actually afraid to want to know, and that you allow yourself to understand" (Harris, 2021, 30:17) The poem I share in this section, "I Could [Never] Imagine," is my effort to overhear myself listening to Mandy.

To create the poem, I adapted the process of reverse interviewing described by Jessica Restaino (n.d.) in a website adaptation of a workshop conducted as part of the event "Performing Feminist Action" hosted by The Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition at the 2016 Conference on College Composition and Communication in Houston, Texas. Restaino outlines the reverse interview process she practiced in a two-year ethnographic project with her friend Susan Lundy Maute as Maute was living and dying with terminal breast cancer. The process, Restaino (n.d.) explains, "offers a way of responding as researchers and writers when we are overwhelmed, disempowered, unsure," a way to "humble [ourselves] and to find affirmation, meaning, in [our] own gaps and hesitations." The move to track and mine the researcher's reaction to interview data—in the moment when it is collected and later when revisiting written transcripts—encapsulates the spirit of the first round of the LG. Both are about listening for and around the interview "landscape" or "plot" (Gilligan et al., 2006, p. 257).

Citing Lisa Mazzei (2007), Restaino (n.d.) conceives of reverse interviewing as a scaffold for "troubled listening" that "goes beyond reflexivity … toward an ongoing process of listening to ourselves and attempting to unmask the veils through which we filter what we say, what we ask, and what we hear" (Mazzei, 2007, p. 110). My process of troubled listening through reverse interviewing involved putting the transcript of my interview with Mandy aside, listening to our recorded interview, and noting voice modulations, pauses and sighs that might hold unexplored meaning. Whereas researchers tend to "seek a voice that maps onto our ways of knowing, understanding, and interpreting," troubled listening compels us to seek "the voice that escapes our easy classification and that does not make easy sense—the voice in the crack" (Mazzei, 2009, p. 48). I listened for the voices in the cracks, my own and Mandy's, that were not obvious, familiar, or easy to hear.

I created a "reactive text" (Restaino, n.d.) by recording phrases that intrigued me or compelled further inquiry and charting my emotive reactions, hesitations, and/or moments of uncertainty as I listened. Next, following Restaino's (n.d.) lead, I mined the reactive text for meanings embedded in my response, inserting questions I might have been initially afraid to ask, noting "associations, tangential thoughts and confusions." Here I troubled my listening tendencies, resisting the easy read. Intentional troubling is important, explains Mazzei (2009), for when we "settle for an easy reading … [we] lose the possibility of tripping up on a translation that entangles us in

the layers and registers of uncertainty. If we settle," she continues, "we fail to consider those other voices that speak beyond the limit of our knowing" (p. 49). In that spirit, I annotated my reactive text, noting sensory details and using evocative words, phrases or metaphors to reflect on and extend my initial responses.

Attending "to what is not spoken, not discussed, not answered" is essential for troubled listening if the goal is alternative ways of knowing and being, "for in those absences is where the very fat and rich information is yet to be known and understood" (Mazzei, 2003, p. 358). Poetic inquiry offered me the perfect structure for accessing the "fat" material. Toward that end, I extended Restaino's (n.d.) reverse interview process by using the annotated reactive text as the basis for found poetry. I extracted words and phrases indicative of the nuances of my response and arranged, added, and subtracted with attention to rhythm, line breaks, pauses, and syntax (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Once again, poetry became a "misfit" (Restaino, p. 85) tool, this time for troubled listening as a way of orienting to research data and participants. The following poem rooted in the reverse interview process enacts and encourages troubled listening by producing a text "that desires, that searches for, and that demands an irrelevant translation … that performs its mission by being messy, opaque, polyphonic, and nuanced—one that exceeds our knowing (easily) and understanding (quickly)" (Mazzei, 2009, p. 50).

I Could [Never] Imagine

Tearing up at the sadness; not having what she needs.
I can relate: Desperation … resounding, relentless doubt.
Sitting at the top of the stairs, a new mom, crying,
wondering if I would finish … what I put my family through!
YET my tone is light: 'sure sure.' Right way to react?
As a friend, a researcher? Am I a voyeur? My researcher mind,
excited when emotion bubbles up and over.

What brings her to the brink of tears, allows her to "get control"?
Sniffs, breathy. Why don't I look for tissues?
Too focused on normalizing tears to respond to them.
I am the one in control, not crying, not showing emotion.
I choose what to reveal. "Lightness" and energy are distancing
mechanisms. I am ~~never~~ [always?] vulnerable.

Tears again. Long pause. Voice breaking.
I just marvel—wow. A spectator to her pain.
Don't know how to probe, to ask more, strike the tone, be a person
not feeling that pain and still "be WITH" in the moment.

A refrain: crying, ebbing-and-flowing emotion.
Voice wet, saliva-swallowing, smacking lips
tell me how much this matters, through tears,
sobbing breath, shaky words.
Am I missing things that mean this much to others
who choose not to cry with outward emotion that
I recognize?

So tired. [Snot-sucking]—deep breath. Long pause.
"Trying to think about" questions I ask.
Who am I to provoke tears, instigate suffering?
Or is crying—the space to name and process—valuable?
I feel the weight of responsibility to do something
meaningful with these gifts, when I hear the voice.
My stomach drops.

How does laughter work for us? Let me count the ways.
She laughs [in] desperation. Why do I laugh along?
Comfort? Don't want to dig in? My façade:
voice professional, not intimate, performing
warmth, like I am smiling. I laugh to defuse
tough questions.

Nature of mental health struggles, stigma.
[Snuffling], crying, complete breakdown, sobbing.
She enacts the cycle in front of me. Pure vulnerability.
Crying and laughing through tears. "Stupid thought process
I have to work through" will never go away.

I don't know what that feels like, (ugh!) her frustration, exasperation.
"Hold between us the intersubjective tension: 'I could never imagine/
I could imagine'"[16] my own … issues—tiptoeing around the edges
of what I cannot [fathom] can exist. Intervention, need for control.
To be in "contact with that which we otherwise cannot imagine"[17]
Should I communicate when it is not mine?

As my poem illustrates, the reverse interview process focused my attention

16. Benjamin, 2014, p. 3, as cited in Restaino, 2019, p. 122
17. Restaino, 2019, p. 122

on those voices and silences to which I had yet to listen. "Such a listening," Restaino (n.d.) notes quoting Mazzei, "requires courage [of researchers] and a willingness to break our own silences, and to ask the questions we dare not ask, that we prefer not to ask, that we prefer not to hear" (2007, p. 110). In the poem, I see myself wrestling with the ethics, as a researcher and as a human, of bearing witness to another person's suffering. I am at once honored and awed by Mandy's willingness to be vulnerable, to not only openly discuss in visceral ways her experience of mental health struggles and the impact on her writing life, but also to enact "the cycle in front me" (stanza 7, line 3), "snuffling" (stanza 7, line 2) "through tears" (stanza 4, line 3) and "snot-sucking" (stanza 5, line 1), sighing with the futility of it all, and laugh-crying toward hope. I own my inadequacy in the moment, my struggle to comfort from a distance, to placate and keep the conversation moving. I worry my behavior indicates an extractive tendency to claim Mandy's suffering for my own benefit, to enhance my research. As she dabbed her eyes and blew her nose, was I already building in my head an argument with her experience for improving mental health support for faculty writers? The reverse interview process led me to ask tough questions of myself and reckon with my intentions as a researcher, my behaviors as a fellow human. Using the troubled listening inspired by the reverse interview process to write poetry feels like an act of reciprocity, a way of treating "researcher vulnerability as yet another aspect of data" (Restaino, n.d.).

By inviting the type of reflexive listening required to compose it, my poem cultivates a kind of "rhetorical empathy," which rhetoric scholar Lisa Blankenship (2019) explains as a relational orientation that entails "both a seeing against and a seeing with—a practice that involves both critical and connected readings," one that is aware of how power and positionality can pollute empathetic intentions (p. 17). Pairing the profile poem with a found poem from my reactive text is one way to acknowledge the power dynamic and consider what it means for my interpretation of Mandy's narrative landscape. Together, the poems position my voice and Mandy's, and the silences in between, dialogically. Silence speaks. Leaning into those silences is a form of openness and receptivity facilitated by poetic inquiry. Rendering the profile and the reverse interview in poetic form emphasizes the role of feeling in receptivity, following Timothy Oleksiak's (2020b) observation that listening is not only a cognitive experience, but an emotional one.

A self-reflexive practice of critical rhetorical empathy, my enactment of the first round of the LG honors intersubjective knowing, acknowledges the complexity, vitality, and mutuality of the self/other relationship. Importantly, as Gilligan and her colleagues (2006) point out, no single round of listening should stand alone, for each listening reveals another dimension, like "following the oboe through a piece of music and then listening again, this time following the clarinet" (p. 256). In that spirit, I next share I-poems created from Mandy's transcripts by following round two of the LG.

Attending to Change/Continuity in Participant's Sense of Self: I-Poems (Round Two)

The purpose of creating I-poems to is to attend to the "'I voice,' which locates the participants' sense of agency and self throughout the text" (Koelsch, 2015, p. 98). The focus is not on identifying a "plot" (Gilligan et al., 2006, p. 257) in a set of interview data as in the first round of listening but on changes and continuities in sense of self as expressed poetically. This type of listening, according to Koelsch (2015), acknowledges that participants' stories are not "a pure recollection of events" but are "among other things, what was remembered, what has been shaped by multiple tellings, what has been collapsed or altered to fit within available discourses, and what seems appropriate to tell in the interview setting" (p. 103). The I-voice tells us something about the *telling* of the stories. "To learn about the self," writes Koelsch (2015), "we must look beyond what can be externalized and quantified, and listen to the many ways in which the self speaks" (p. 104); I-poems are ideal for getting at this kind of poetic truth, a truth that is not to be taken literally but offers access to the "narrated worlds" of others (p. 104).

To create the following series of I-poems, I selected a subset of data from Mandy's interviews, focusing on her responses to a question I asked in almost every interview: *How would you describe yourself as a writer in this moment?* In cases when I didn't ask the question, I chose passages toward the end of the interview when she talked about her writing practice or self as a writer. Following Koelsch's approach to creating I-poems, I identified each instance of the word "I" In the designated passages and extracted it from the interview text along with its associated verb and additional words needed to create a meaningful phrase. I listed the I-phrases down the page, creating poems that surface Mandy's senses of self. Inspired by Edwards and Weller's (2012) use of I-poems with longitudinal data to capture change and continuity over longer periods of time, I created an I-poem from each of Mandy's eight interviews beginning in 2016 and ending in 2023. For the sake of space, I have not included all the poems but chose some from early in the project, some from the middle, and some from near the end of the project. The cascading I-statements that comprise each poem draw attention away from the kind of writer Mandy said she was in each interview and instead suggest the various voices she inhabited as a writer at different points in time over the years.

2016

I'm first generation
I just always carried that
I am smart
I have to compare
I'm smarter

I don't know
I stopped
I started
I think
I just had to
I guess
I'm smart
I think
I don't want to compare
I do
I think
I think
I know
I was raised
I think
I just accept
I'm tall
I'm musical
I play volleyball
I'm smart
I'm not
I can't
I always just
I work hard enough
I can
I'm just not
I appreciate
I can
I was smart
I worked hard
I am
I think

2018

I think
I don't give a fuck

I just
I won't
I have
I'll be
I have a problem
I did
I have another
I want to avoid
I accept
I related
I had
I have
I'm like well damn
I thought
I could
I can't
I can't
I think
I'm the exception
I'm not
I don't
I'll just
I just
I think
I read
I mean
I'll read
I need
I will read you
I will do what you tell me
I can be better to myself
I can be better at my job
I'll be better
I think
I know
I'm the person

I want
I can be who
I need to be
I'm doing
I don't know
I don't know
I forgot
I wrote

2020

I'm a writer who persists
despite obstacles
does
meaningful work
I'm being told
I have to
I really appreciate
I guess
I can
I've been a part
I thought
I could
I only have
I had expected
I'm still
I can do that
I have enough
I'm okay
I'm okay
I don't have that pressure
I think
I think part of me
I do
I think
I set
I signed

I let fall
I think
I'm getting more
I think so
I think
I've heard
I kinda feel
I'm at
I did what
I had to do
I can do the work
I care about

2021

I am a writer who can get shit done
I am a writer who has gotten shit done
I think maybe
I couldn't think
I think now
I have
I'm not quite there
I don't care
I get
I care more
I think
I see
I'm not just worried

2022

I am writer who is effective
I am an expert
I'm a writer that writes things that matter
I think
I want to continue
I think
I'd like to say

I'm a writer who writes regularly
I guess
I just have to get shit done
I just gotta fucking get it done
I did it
I got it done
I think maybe
I'm an expert
I am because
I got tenure
I'm happy with where
I'm at

2023

I am writer who is published
accomplished
focuses on making a difference
I would like to say
I'm a productive writer
I don't
I think that's pretty good.

Following Edwards and Weller's (2012) lead, I conduct a "voices analysis" of Mandy's I-poems in order to reveal "some of the voices she spoke in, or selves from which she spoke, and their shifts over time" (p. 212). In 2016, one voice that stands out is the hard worker voice. Mandy identifies as first generation; she wants to feel and be considered smart but wrestles with how that need entails comparing herself to others. To mitigate the feeling that she is not smart, Mandy clings to the sense of herself as a hard worker. In 2018, Mandy tries on an apathetic voice ("I don't give a fuck," line 2), but then leans back into dogged determination ("I will do what you tell me/I can be better to myself/I can be better at my job/I'll be better," lines 32-35). In the end we see conflicting voices waffling between a confident voice ("I know/I'm the person/I want/I can be who/I need to be," lines 37-41) and self-doubt ("I don't know/I don't know/I forgot," lines 43-45). In 2020, we see the hard worker voice return ("I'm a writer who persists/despite obstacles," lines 1-2) but with a change as Mandy chooses to do "meaningful work" (line 4). Not necessarily working hard just to work hard, Mandy's self-empowered voice chants "I'm okay/I'm okay" (lines 18-19) and "I did what/ I had to do" (lines 35-36)." "I can do the work/I care about" (lines 37-38), she proclaims.

In 2021 the hard worker voice continues to evolve. The reader can see a self fully confident in Mandy's capacity to produce, to do the work ("I am a writer who can get shit done," line 1) based not only on will power but track record ("I am a writer who has gotten shit done," line 2). The uncertain voice still comes through ("I don't care," line 8; "I care more," line 10) but a new steadfastness has emerged ("I'm not just worried," line 13). In 2022, an expert voice shows up, a "… writer who is effective" (line 1), "… writes things that matter" (line 3), "writes regularly" (line 8), who knows she's "… just gotta fucking get it done" (line 11) and "… got it done" (line 13). We see contentment ("I'm happy with where/I'm at," lines 18-19) but self-assessment is still tethered to external evaluation ("I'm an expert/I am because/I got tenure," lines 15-17). The voice in 2023, though, suggests ongoing evolution, a self-shifting focus from production to "… making a difference" (line 3). The final lines might be read as resistance to external measures ("I would like to say/I'm a productive writer/I don't/I think that's pretty good," lines 4-7). The reader can see traces of the tether to external validation alongside a commitment to acknowledge and resist that urge.

I-poems crafted from Mandy's transcript offer another way to listen for meaning to be gleaned from her interview data, one that attends to the "multiplicity of what appears on the surface as a single voice" (Koelsch, 2015, p. 97), a smooth narrative. I-poems are ideal for this type of listening, for poetic inquiry tends to be "multifaceted, rhizomatic, and inconclusive" (Koelsch, 2015, p. 97). Although the goal is to tune into the participant's multiple, resonant, conflicting, evolving senses of self, I-poems like any research poem, "highlight the coconstructed nature of meaning" (Koelsch, 2015, p. 99). The words are the participant's, and the order of the words stays true to the transcript, but the researcher decides the length of the phrases and the subset of data from which they are drawn, and the reader reacts with emotion evoked by poetic representation. No one person controls the interpretation. As Koelsch (2015) points out, the participant is not an "omniscient narrator" of their story; neither does the researcher or the reader take on an "omniscient role"; rather we struggle together "to understand and interpret the story," co-constructing meanings as we go (p. 103). In this way, I-poems constitute "an act of resistance against the tendency to reduce complex phenomenon into single linear narratives" (Koelsch, 2015, p. 98). "Truth" and meaning are poetic, associative, ephemeral.

Poetic Inquiry for Deep Listening: Considerations for Researchers

By juxtaposing the profile poem, the reverse interview poem, and the I-poems created from longitudinal data, I've illustrated how poetic inquiry can scaffold deep listening as part of a feminist-relational qualitative research praxis. As with the LG itself, the poetic strategies featured in this chapter are best used "when

the researcher expects to hear contradictory and nuanced tales" (Koelsch, 2015, p. 98), which could arguably be any time research involves human subjects. The strategies are practically time consuming and thus more appropriate for subsets of data, which means that "pertinent voices" outside the sample can be lost (Edwards & Weller, 2012, p. 215). Nevertheless, as I've demonstrated here, they offer affordances that make them valuable additions to a qualitative researcher's box of "misfit" (Restaino, 2019, p. 85) tools. Each approach to poetic inquiry can be used alone or in conjunction to "def[y] singular interpretation" and "invit[e] the reader/listener [and researcher!] to engage and grapple with the material" (Koelsch, 2015, p. 104). In this way, the processes I've illustrated in this chapter can be used to uncover traditionally untapped facets of experience.

Comparing various "angle[s] of understanding" created through different "analytic ontologies" reveals multiple dimensions of perception and experience enabling researchers to reflect on the implications of various modes of listening and being for making sense of data (Edwards & Weller, 2012, p. 216). Through their comparison of thematic and I-poem analysis, Edwards and Weller (2012), identify two distinct orientations between researcher and participant: "gazing at" and "standing alongside" (p. 215). I experienced a similar ontological shift from gazing at Mandy to interpret her experience of mental health struggles as a writer on the tenure track, to standing alongside Mandy to interpret changes and continuities in her sense of self as a writer. The difference underscores how orientations to data analysis constitute analytic modes of being, modes that can be distinguished, enhanced, and tellingly compared through poetic strategies for deep listening.

Delineating certain ontological orientations might seem to suggest that each fully encapsulates its respective angle—that gazing at leads to an accurate interpretation of a participant's experience and that standing alongside creates a precise angle for interpreting changes and continuities in the participant's sense of self. It is tempting to believe that rounds of listening featuring self-reflexivity and critical awareness of researcher subjectivities and social locations fully disrupt relational hierarchies by establishing a power-sharing ethos. However, as I hope the generative ambiguity of research poems demonstrates, deep listening is not meant to conjure static insights or grounds for certainty. Using poetic inquiry to listen deeply drives home for researchers that we can never engage participants or data from fully outside selves, experiences, and perceptions.

Moreover, we are never the same "self" in our research. Who we are and how we see, hear, and feel changes from moment to moment. Intentionally juxtaposing poetic strategies helps us to stay "liquid" and to "remember, to remind [ourselves] again and again, to undo stability—or at least mark it as momentary" (Waite, 2017, p. 129). Liquid interpretations, explains Stacey Waite (2017) in her book *Teaching Queer: Radical Possibilities for Writing and Knowing*, approach the world as "fluid, mutable, difficult to pin down" (p. 133). By writing and reading research poetry across analytical ontologies, researchers can listen to ourselves

listening in ways that are intersubjective and dialogic, ways that attend to the "material, embodied, and sensorial" (Faris, 2020). In doing so, we conjure and embrace liquid interpretations as mutable, ever evolving, always in flux. We enact deep listening, "not [as] something to be achieved or arrived at but [as] a way of moving toward a kind of moving, a becoming" in and through our work (Waite, 2017, p. 166).

In this chapter I've demonstrated a few poetic approaches for engaging in rounds of the LG as part of a feminist praxis for challenging meaning-making norms that value static knowledge and certainty. I've shown how this type of poetic inquiry taps into aspects of the participant's and researcher's multisensory experience that traditional tools are not designed to recognize or honor. Pursuing multiple angles and conflicting voices by considering profile poems, reverse interview poems, and I-poems alongside one another resists dominant ideologies making it "difficult to objectify [participants] or apply one-dimensional stereotypes" (Koelsch, 2015, p. 97). As Koelsch (2015) points out: "By using a qualitative methodology that rejects positivist ontological and epistemological assumptions, social science researchers can work outside of traditional discourses, which emphasize rationality and reduction" (p. 97). In that spirit, the poetic approaches illustrated here seek multiplicity, associative logic, ephemeral truths. They invite mutual vulnerability by making visible not only how researchers orient to participants but the role our shifting relationships play in co-constructing (liquid) interpretations that are always moveable, transformable, open to change.

Chapter 4. Collaborative Poetry: Rewriting Research Relationships

The Stories

I didn't say the stories made it this way,
I'm saying that they teach us something
– Julie[18]

Collaborative poetry is a playful, relational approach to poetic inquiryj. Perhaps more than any other approach, it has thrown into relief my role, the role of the researcher as composer, as well as the force of my own lived experience and emotional connection with participants in forming research relationships, interpretations, and poetic representations of the stories they share. Collaborative poetry can take many forms. For example, social work scholar Stanley L. Witkin (2007) describes "relational poetry" as a process informed by social constructionism in which a poet responds to a freestanding poem with a poem of their own and then weaves together lines from each poem to create an entirely new piece. Relational poetry is dialogic, illustrating how "new realities are created in interaction" (Witkin, 2007, p. 478). Like interlocutors deep in conversation, each individual poem is preserved even as they intermingle "constitut[ing] a new context for each other, changing what they 'are'" (Witkin, 2007, p. 479). As with the symmetry drawings of Dutch graphic artist M.C. Escher, Witkin (2007) explains, each read of a relational poem renders visible different components, invoking an "endlessness" (p. 478), as meanings extend infinitely, images and insights morphing and manifesting through time.

Faulkner (2020) describes another form of poetic collaboration, exquisite corpse, wherein researchers seek to "upturn our usual habits of thought" by "us[ing] images and words collectively but hid[ing] half of the writing they do until the end to see what can occur" (p. 176). The playful process can "help uncover group angst and reveal collective unconsciousness" (Faulker, 2020, p. 176) by conjuring what poet Denise Duhamel calls a "third voice" or "poetic hybrid" (Duhamel, 2006, as cited in Faulkner, 2020, p. 176). Exquisite corpse, Faulkner (2020) suggests, can be good for "re-story[ing] a research project," for safely engaging sensitive research topics such as stigmatized identities or lived experience of violence, and for having just plain fun (p. 177).

No matter the form it takes, collaborative poetry is a promising practice for academic researchers and study participants interested in coming "back to the

18. Julie, a participant in my study who chose not to use a pseudonym, wrote this found poem based on her 2018 interview transcript.

body" in ways that make "the academy less frigid and hierarchal" (Faulkner, 2020, p. 90). In fact, collaborators have found poetic inquiry ideal for exploring and critiquing academic structures and relationships. To illustrate, Faulkner (2020) describes how Esther Fitzpatrick and Mohamed Alansari (2018) embraced collaborative poetic inquiry as "an embodied methodology of reflection" (Faulker, 2020, p. 90) in order to interrogate their experience completing doctoral work. Faulkner also mentions Esther Fitzpatrick and Katie Fitzpatrick's (2015) use of collaborative poetry to examine and reflexively deepen relationships among research supervisors and students. As these examples suggest, collaborative poetry among academics can be a means of recovery and restoration in the face of dehumanizing academic systems and structures. Driving home the value of playfulness in the process, Faulkner (2020) describes the work of Pamela P. Richardson and Susan Walsh (2018), wherein the collaborators combined renga, a Japanese poetic form, with Miksang, a form of contemplative photography, "to co-create a space of healing from their academic lives" (Faulkner, 2020, p. 91). Because I am a faculty writer interviewing faculty writers, these qualities of collaborative poetic inquiry appeal to me.

In this chapter, I focus on tandem found poetry (TFP), a process of collaborative poetry which, according to compositionist and education scholar Melanie Burdick (2011), happens when "two found poems are created separately but at roughly the same time, from the same text, by the interviewer and the participant." Drawing on her interview-based study of teachers' experiences, Burdick (2011) advocates for TFP in research situations where "layered relationships of meaning and interpretation"—such as interpreting interview transcripts, interpreting experiences described in the interviews, interpreting interpretations of the experiences and the stories about them—"demand a more hermeneutic inquiry." The longitudinal nature of my study invited layered meaning and interpretation; it fostered long-term relationships with participants and created opportunities for us to revisit writers' past experiences recursively over time. I was drawn to poetic inquiry, broadly speaking, because the artistic orientation to research lets go the "façade of objectivity" and "exploits the potential of selectivity and emphasis to say what needs saying" (Eisner, 1981, as cited in Burdick, 2011). Tandem found poetry appeals to me in particular because it intentionally rejects positivist assumptions and traditional power dynamics of researcher/researched (Burdick, 2011), inviting study participants to collaborate in the determination of what needs saying and how it might best be said.

In February 2022, I invited Julie, a faculty writer from my study, to join me in the process of TFP. For a year, we independently composed found poems, including the poem opening this chapter, from Julie's interview transcripts. Inspired by poet-researcher-therapist Sarah Penwarden's (2017) "rescued speech poems" (p. 225), found poems created from a person's words shared during a therapy session, we created our poems by listening "with an aesthetically tuned ear for poetry" within our transcripts (p. 226). We agreed on a basic approach that involved

listening for the overall narrative of our conversations, identifying evocative phrases, metaphors, imagery, symbols, and resonant "occasions" (Sullivan, 2009). Loosely following Burdick's (2011) process, Julie and I met regularly to exchange poems and consider how they spoke to each other. We noted similarities and differences in content, word choice, point of view, and literary devices, listening for insights about our development as writers, women, creatives, and humans.

Julie and I knew immediately that we were engaging in a uniquely valuable and deeply moving process. In order to understand what made it so meaningful, I treated the documentation of various steps of our recursive process as self-generated data. I considered our original interviews; re-read the poems we composed, including an anthology Julie compiled from our corpus; and poured over transcripts capturing our conversations when we met monthly to share and discuss our poems. Finally, in her ultimate interview as a member of my longitudinal study, Julie and I reflected on the TFP process, so our thoughts and insights became part of that transcript.

In what follows, I draw on this material to consider the process and products of our TFP experience and to explore the promise of this collaborative inquiry method for writing researchers. Of the questions poetic inquiry can help researchers pursue, collaborative poetry is well suited to engage the following:

- How do I make visible the "human" in human subjects research?
- How can I more fully honor the nuance of participants' lived experience?
- How might I orient to my work not as an objective analyst, but as a "vulnerable observer" (Behar, 1996) immersed in the process?
- How can I center relationships (with scholars/scholarship, research participants, self and readers) as both the foundation and goal for my research and writing?

Using my experience with Julie as a touchstone, I show how TFP offers a means for creatively and collaboratively grappling with these questions by profoundly and playfully shifting traditional research relationships and outcomes that privilege the researcher's plans, interpretations, and insights.

Through TFP, Julie and I revisited with openness and wonder the stories she shared about her writing life, eager to see if/how they might speak to us in each new moment, looking back and reaching forward. Using poetry to artistically engage co-created research material inspired collaborative negotiation of meaning; it generated opportunities for creative experimentation and imaginative extrapolation as we explored what our poems could mean. Our process (a) revealed the invigorating reality of multiple, simultaneous truths co-existing in the present moment and reaching forward and back across time; (b) cultivated affirming instances of surprise and delight; and (c) supported healing in the midst of struggle and significant life change—Julie's decision to leave her tenured faculty position and academia. By centering relationality, TFP usefully troubled traditional researcher/participant roles in ways that nurtured us, the humans

at the heart of human subjects research, and conjured unique insight into the recursive evolution of faculty writing lives. It what follows I trace, reflect on, and analyze our process in hopes of revealing the challenges and affordances of this type of poetic inquiry and inspiring writing researchers to adapt it for their own needs and contexts.

Our Tandem Found Poetry Process

Our process for crafting found poems from interview transcripts changed over time as we grappled with our purpose—were we trying to capture something about the meaning expressed in each interview as we understood it in the present moment looking back, or something about the experiences being discussed as they were described then? Or were we simply playing with what was there, putting interesting/provocative images, words, phrases, together to see what they might mean? Julie explained that in the beginning she was trying to "capture and understand the moment," enact "reflection with distance," and also "make something interesting." She wrote just one poem, to my six, from our first interview transcript (2016):

Parallel Universe

i'm trouble-writing
rolling over and over
it is not working

weakness i can show?
put up a very good front
squandering the time

you can't let that show
giving myself permission:
life is relevant,

it's not just an end,
that version of me is done,
see i'm good enough

i'm always rushing
-- so maybe in the summer --
it's kind of lonely

// a parallel universe
in the middle of the night

really slippery //

it's so far away --
that's the only urgency:
the end of the world.

impossible to ignore
the house in boxes

i just built myself that way

Julie described her early process this way: "I took it fairly cavalier[ly] … I would just copy and paste the words that I thought were interesting, or the phrases that jumped out at me." She would put them in a blank document in a column and then use different strategies, like alphabetizing, to mix them up so they would be out of order. "At first it was really hard for me," Julie admitted, "I was adhering so close to what was in the transcripts. And I also felt like it wasn't making a ... It wasn't poetic. It wasn't a standalone thing that a person would wanna read." Like Julie, I also stuck close to the transcripts in the beginning, trying to capture a feeling, struggle, or insight I sensed there. We often found our poems circled around similar points, albeit from different perspectives. Here is one of my poems from our first transcript (2016), which clearly resonates with Julie's poem "Parallel Universe," above.

Letting Life Be

r … u … n the risk of writing
in an b t a t world
a s r c

p u
a n
W r i t i n g is part of it.
a v
l e
l r
e s

l e

When I was younger I could ~~do everything~~ somehow
find the energy and make it happen.
Not anymore.

Julie marveled at the connections among our poems. "Even though I wrote one poem and you wrote six," she told me, "it's so interesting to find those points that they each hit, regardless of how much is or isn't in the space between those points …. The idea of the parallel universe does seem to be at the heart off this interview," she continued, "and both of our poetry based on it—the idea of what writing is like when it's done for others' sake and when it's done for joy." In this case, we even drew on similar stylistic representations; Julie observed, "I thought it was interesting that we both tried to recreate the idea of parallelism visually—you with the vertical text and me with the // symbol." Overlaps like these led to rich conversations around intersecting themes, ideas, or experiences from the transcripts.

As our process of creating TFP evolved, Julie and I inspired one another with our approaches to poetic play, each eager to experiment with strategies we saw employed in the other's poems. In the beginning I used only Julie's words, approaching the task like a researcher, while Julie used my words in her poems, especially when something I said in an interview captured what she was trying to say, or when I gave an image to something she was feeling. I often wrote concrete poems, poems written so the words form shapes on the page (see the foregoing poem "Letting Life Be"), and Julie ended up trying the tactic herself. Julie called this mutual inspiration "cross-pollinating," a process that allowed us to get "more free with [our poetry] as we went on, and more playful and open to more radical departures from the original text." We started hunting for funny words or phrases, juicy images rather than just emotion words. Julie wrote the following poem from our 2022 transcript.

[**From jot …**]

none
replaced
toxic
chicken
and
toxic
egg
if I take
this job
I am saying:
You
can throw staplers
at me,
I've been

warned and I am
accepting
this
risk

As time went on, Julie said, she felt more like writing "a poem now and a lot less like writing a poem about then." Eventually, we started to let our poems lead us, using forms (like sonnets or villanelles) to structure poems, relying on rhyme, sound, and other devices to create an effect. For example, when we struggled (independently of one another) to identify a clear narrative arc in the 2017 transcript, we both reached for form to build containers for the messy memories, experiences, and sentiments—Julie wrote the sonnet ("Growing") and I wrote the Haiku ("Maybe the summer will stretch").

Growing

I think I'm writing a new book from scratch.
"You should focus only on Mexico."
The other said, "You should cut Mexico."
"Why don't you write the book you want to
write?"
"Our job is to whip you." "You're a workhorse!"
That kind of paralyzed me for a while.
I wake up sweating! *you haven't done it!*
gosh, what have I been doing with my time?

"What if you took time out of it? What then?"
Clear time. Short-circuit the automatic.
Nothing else knocking at the door. Ideal?
"You do your piece of this." *Ignore the rest.*

Struggling in place. *I am persistent.*
Struggling forward. *Act like a writer.*

Maybe the summer will stretch

Sit with this sentence
A while or a paragraph
But what if I just …

Be present, writing
Hard to imagine my days
do that already

June next month, I don't
Even count August. Useless.
Rhythm of slow days.

The forms we chose have rich lineages that suggest why we turned to them in this process, adding layers of meaning to the found poems they helped us create. With beginnings traced to social gatherings, including Japanese party games, and travel, the haiku has become a flexible form with a long history in English as well (Runyan, 2021). Drawing on American haiku writer Christopher Patchel, poet Tania Runyan (2021) describes the spirit of the form as rooted in focused perception, immediacy of experience against the backdrop

of time, sensory images that capture a moment, and a piercing pivot or juxtaposition of contrasting parts. Honoring Shintoism roots that point toward aliveness and Buddhist roots that acknowledge impermanence, Joshua Gage, poet and editor of *The Ohio Haiku Anthology*, deems haiku "the moments in between," the fleeting "bursts and pauses that catch your attention" if you are open and attuned to the present moment (qtd. in Runyan, 2021, p. 152). According to Runyan, haiku is ultimately about noticing. Perhaps that was what drew me to the form as a way to crystallize what I saw and felt as I read Julie's transcripts.

In a similar vein, Julie embraced the sonnet, which conjures a very different historical tradition, bringing to mind Shakespeare or Petrarch. Julie's poem is roughly a Shakesperean sonnet with three four-line stanzas and one two-line stanza, although her final stanza does not rhyme, as is traditional. Each line is comprised of ten syllables, and the last couplet signals a turn or change of heart. Perhaps Julie was drawn to the sonnet as a form that explores emotion, connects to movement and breath, and can lead to unexpected insights (Runyan, 2021). She seems to play with the idea of struggling in her final couplet ("Struggling in place…/Struggling forward…" (stanza 4, lines 1-2) and what it says about her as writer ("I am persistent"/"Act like a writer" (stanza 4, lines 1-2) doing the work of writing. Perhaps the rigorous rules of the sonnet provided a framework for Julie to think into. Recounting her own journey writing sonnets, Runyan (2021) reflects on how the limitation of form can be freeing; "Structure is my muse," she writes (p. 38). Whatever the draw, Julie's choice to write a sonnet and my use of haiku demonstrate the possibilities of poetic play for experimenting with different sense-making frameworks.

Interestingly, when working in structured poetic forms, Julie and I felt less bound to the source texts. Julie enjoyed crafting lines with words that weren't adjacent in the transcript and creating affect that was very different from what the original transcript implied. Accordingly, as we relaxed into the process, our poems were more likely to go in different directions, offer different perspectives and pick up on different themes. Julie called this "freedom from experience"—freedom that comes from experience with the process and being exposed to one another's ways of approaching it.

Shifts in our process led us to think differently about meaning making—how we interpreted meaning in the transcripts, how we crafted poems to mean something, how we listened for unexpected meanings to surface in our individual poems as well as in the juxtaposition of our poems with one another. Julie put it this way: "The meaning making was us reading it. It wasn't like we have to get to the original meaning that it meant when we did the interview. It was like, right now with reflection and with context, what does this mean?" In the end, we surrendered to poetic praxis, as writers and readers of found poems, inhabiting a spirit of wonder, staying curious about what poems could show us that we hadn't seen or known before. Julie's poem "Building." written from our 2020 interview transcript, illustrates that sense of wonder and play.

Building

Stones floating in the air
over lava
they fall
as you step
on
each
one
You have to get to the next one
as
they're
falling

And now …

Building
a pyramid. It's not on
the ground. Not on lava. See your future work

Differently.

Once we'd crafted poems from each of the seven transcripts, we each curated a poetry collection, independently selecting and arranging poems from the corpus. Julie admitted to initially feeling trepidatious about building an anthology. She wondered if the poems could be something on their own to an audience outside our context. After all, she reflected, we are the people in the interviews and the one's writing the poems, so we know generally what we are talking about. Beyond that, Julie asked, "How will these things stand up? How will this work?" With this in mind, we considered the curating process as a kind of revision. Julie described "a relationship to revision that's not so much about evaluating the work, and more about like which poems fit together, which poems have a dialogue together, thinking about putting poems in order is a revision."

Julie began by printing all poems without distinguishing which were hers and which were mine and shuffling them out of chronological order. By then she didn't remember who wrote what. She imagined she'd received these submissions and was picking the ones she wanted to keep. She made several passes, whittling down the selections, since we'd given ourselves a 40-page limit. She worried she'd only choose her own, but it ended up to be about even. She wrestled with what to do with poems that were very similar, wondered if they'd be too repetitive, but kept them in the end. In terms of ordering the poems, Julie told me she "wanted to start off with a favorite and then end really strong and then kind of like go like

this in between as far as what [she] saw as the impact of [the poems]." Here are the poems she chose to open and end her anthology.

Bootstraps

i built all of this
resourceful, independent
leaning, reaching
        frantic fragility

you're under anesthesia,
ignore the foggy people who care
for each other,
who trust, protect:
you're still alive
you run, walk, climb
because you're resting on a pedestal.

The Last Woman

Non-response to the onslaught, wing on like spinning wheels
step back and see myself, just one of many, this job, a job, *my*
        job,
mine the word torn, make this more about where I happened
        to be.
I've started to see the way it's built … Continue this act:
gut the suit
hollow exodus
sinking ship.

Julie had recently taken a bookbinding class and decided to make her collection into a bound book for me (Figure 4.1). Imagining it as a gift, she said, helped her want to finish and write a foreword.

When I asked Julie to reflect on her final collection, she mused:

> In some ways, to me it is a book about me entering academia, meeting the criteria for this big goal, and then leaving … but it also feels like there's so much more there. It feels so personal and just about writing in general and about being a human being and a mortal person, there's so much more to it than just that. … Maybe I would say that it's also about trying to figure out what we're supposed to be doing here.

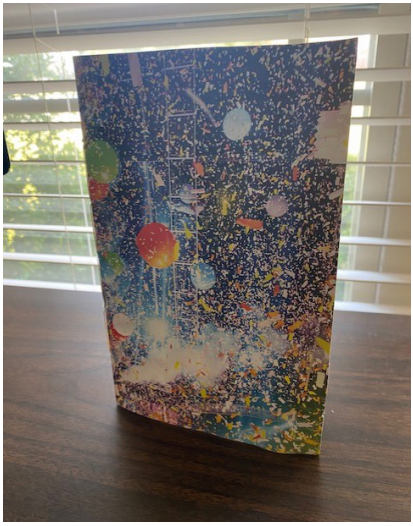

Figure 4.1. Julie's bound TFP anthology

As Julie's reflection illustrates, TFP is valuable in part because the process stimulates unique forms of meaning making. By disrupting the knower/known dynamic of a traditional research relationship, TFP unearths new meanings for those involved in the process and possibly for others as well.

Around the time Julie was choosing poems for her anthology, she was invited to read poetry at a local brewery and decided to perform one she'd written through our TFP process. She was thrilled to see our poems could work on their own, with an audience outside the project. Here is an excerpt from the poem Julie read.

jot
down
a
line
from
Change:
broad
strokes
back
burnered
enclosed
academia
no
future

channel
everything
you
have
into
this
tiny,
tiny,
tiny
self

In a similar vein, after I gave a presentation on TFP and shared poems from Julie's anthology at a conference, session attendees asked where they could purchase their copy, hungry for the evocative experience our poems offered. In response, Julie and I are in the process of creating copies of our anthologies to share with colleagues and interested readers. As our continued collaboration and the demand for our collections shows, TFP is not just about representing qualitative research data; it fosters long-term relationships rooted in mutual vulnerability and creative practice, and it generates evocative meaning relevant within and far beyond the original research context.

Friendship, Poetry, and Methodological Surrender

Relationships fostered through TFP diverge from typical research relationships. Unlike the researcher-participant dynamic that defined our interview exchanges, when Julie and I met to discuss our poems, our conversations were reciprocal, neither of us was the interviewer or interviewee and both of us were. We engaged in what Carolyn Ellis, Christine E. Kiesinger, and Lisa M. Tillmann-Healy (1997) call "interactive interviewing," wherein "the feelings, insight, and stories" we each brought to the encounter felt equally important (p. 121). Lisa M. Tillmann-Healy (2003) might call our "open, multivoiced, and emotionally rich" inquiry "friendship as method," which she explains "involves the practices, the pace, the contexts, and the ethics of friendship" (p. 734). And Julie and I *are* close friends. We've been teammates in a local volleyball league; I dressed as Jolene to Julie's Dolly Parton for our town's 5k monster dash; we've volunteered together for Poetic Justice, a non-profit that facilitates restorative writing workshops for incarcerated women; we co-developed and co-facilitated a workshop on creative practice for retirees through my university's lifelong learning office; and we recently spent a week together learning to surf! Our friendship and collaboration fuel one another. Julie created the following found poem from her 2021 interview transcript. For me, it captures the intimacy, adventure, and life that defines our friendship.

Memento Mori

I'm awake, thinking about death.
Everybody's death.
It's a presence I'm getting used to.
I've been thinking about it in a calm way,
a little unsettling,
being the only one awake
in the world.

Thinking about death
is thinking about life:
How do you want to live
every day life?
How do you want to be
In the world?

Relational qualities inspired by TFP—intimacy, trust, mutual vulnerability, empathic listening, the courage to be reflexively critical, willingness to compare experiences, and openness to new insights—emerged from and alongside our friendship. However, long-term friendship need not be a condition of TFP. Indeed, the process honors the relationships of participants, whatever they might be, and enriches those relationships in whatever ways participants might need or want. In this way relationships fostered by TFP are similar to "writing partnerships" Rosenberg (2020) says emerged during her longitudinal research with adult learners: "relational and organic, following the events and patterns of our lives as they intersect with the research" (p. 100). Qualities of friendship become a strength rather than an ethical hurdle or detriment to rigorous analysis, as is often the case with traditional qualitative research.

Julie and I found that the friendship methodology of TFP meaningfully complicated our roles as researcher and participant, knower and known, but we did not shed those roles altogether. Especially early on, our research-related perspectives informed our poetic approaches, as the following comment from Julie's reflection on poems written from her 2016 interview transcript observes:

> I wonder about the explicitness of your poems and what I think of as more abstractness of mine—it struck me as I read details about leaving Mexico City, marriage ending, dissertation committees, etc. that maybe I avoided naming those negative experiences too directly in my poem, maybe to keep them from taking on a life of their own? Maybe since those are the kind of specific details that help you understand my experiences they

> are more meaningful and necessary for your poems? (Just a guess.) That could be part of the difference between the roles of the self-reflective participant and the investigator—this could be a question to explore.

As Julie's reflection intimates, the TFP process surfaced differences in our perspectives and ways of understanding and enabled our differences to interact in untraditional ways. Our subjectivities became assets for meaning making.

As we chiseled words, ideas, experiences from our interview transcripts and formed them into poems, neither of us could hide behind the illusion of "objective" data analysis. Together, we forged new meaning, generated new discoveries and provocative ways of seeing that neither of us would have come to on our own. I wrote the following found poem, which appeared in Julie's final anthology, based on our 2020 interview transcript. It captures the spirit of experimentation and collaborative meaning making with which we embraced TFP.

Creative Activity: A Translation

A subtle thing, my proposal.

People say that blank slate can be overwhelming.

I see how it could feel that way.

Emptiness and uncertainty.

Expansive feels so long.

What gave me the audacity, the wherewithal to say

"See if it works … "

And then it did.

Tandem found poetry cultivated what Jordan (2008) might call a "growth-fostering relationship"—one that involved "relational authenticity, mutual empathy, and mutual empowerment/encouragement" (p. 221). Julie marveled at how much "more empowering" it was "to write a poem from stories/transcript than to have someone write a paper about it." For my part, it felt good to be seen, to let go the effort it took to remain neutral, blend into the background of a research study, swallow feelings and reactions because they might be interpreted as signs of shoddy analysis. Julie beautifully captured the joy and promise of participating in such a partnership. There was "something about being poised on the edge of something ..." she mused when reflecting on the found poems we created from her 2017 interview transcript, "looking back at difficulties, but then also not quite over the precipice. That tension between struggle and growing. The moment that growth emerges from struggle."

The vulnerable relationships fostered by TFP and the rich forms of meaning making they enable offer promising opportunities for qualitative writing researchers. Tandem found poetry provides a means to, in Restaino's (2019) words "enact a

methodology for surrender and failure," as researchers and participants "work from a place of our own fractured, multiple selves" in the midst of projects that "demand of us real intimacy and risk" (p. 72). Restaino (2019) invokes Halberstam's (2011) "radical passivity" to describe the spirit of methodological surrender—a relinquishing of control in which researcher and participant-collaborator allow themselves to "crash" (p. 127) in to one another, to "come into such chaotic, destabilizing contact" that we create the kind of "'bad data' that can nourish a rhetorical undoing of self and other," opening the radical possibility of new knowledge (p. 128).

Restaino (2019) illustrates the risk and promise of radical passivity in a way that crystalizes the value of TFP as vehicle for such work. She cites Halberstam's (2011) analysis of Yoko Ono's performance art *Cut Piece* in which Ono invites audience members to come to her on stage and cut away pieces of her clothing until she is naked and vulnerable. Halberstam describes these "cutting gestures" as dedicated "completely and ferociously to the destruction of self and other" (Halberstam, 2011, as cited in Restaino, 2019, p. 72). Humans cannot entirely separate ourselves, this act of "loving destruction" (Restaino, 2019, p. 72) suggests, nor can we fully know one another. Yet by "commit[ting] to the fragment over any fantasy of future wholeness" (Halberstam, 2011, as cited in Restaino, 2019, p. 128), by acknowledging the capacity of bodies, "any body … to literally fall to pieces," we open ourselves up to new ways of knowing and being (Restaino, 2019, p.128). The process of TFP invites researcher and participant to lovingly destroy transcripts and the narratives captured there, honoring the fragments, the pieces which can mean differently in their new poetic context. In the case of qualitative research, cut pieces are the shards of glass we researchers carve and collect, each reflecting a necessarily partial view of the whole—whole person, whole self, whole picture, whole life—we are desperate to hold in view. In our eagerness to know (ourselves and others), we cut away bits and suture them into arguments about what we think we see, even though it is impossible to depict what does not exist—unfractured identity, certain meaning.

The process is not unlike what McGann and Samuels (2006) call "interpretive deformation," a radical approach to reading literature and other cultural artifacts that involves "a disordering of one's senses of the work" (p. 154), putting the reader in "a highly idiosyncratic relation to the work" (p. 161) so as to "imagine things about the text that we didn't and perhaps couldn't otherwise know" (p. 161). Scholars of literary criticism (McGann & Samuels, 2006), media studies (Mittell, 2021), and digital humanities (Sample, 2012) have demonstrated a range of deformative techniques for "breaking things" (Sample, 2012) to discover new meanings, including reading backwards, transposing, altering or reordering a text or image, and isolating words or elements. Although scholars disagree about the extent to which the deformed work is the end or the means to an end (Sample, 2012), they acknowledge the epistemological and pedagogical potential of the activity as it resists fixation on authorial intent and underscores the role of critics, or in my case researchers, as "makers of poetic meaning in the act" (McGann & Samuels,

2006, p. 180) of interpretation. Cutting in the context of TFP might be considered a generative act of deformation, "a legitimate mode of doing and knowing. Precisely because it relies on undoing and unknowing" (Sample, 2012). Critical awareness of the responsibility and relationality involved in interpretive deformation is central to the act of cutting. While traditional methods can obscure both the violence and the magic of destruction, TFP lays bare the viciousness and futility of cutting as well as its promise and possibility—we cut words from transcripts and boldly re-arrange, re-associating them to see what they say, releasing our hold on them, and owning our part in the meanings they capture.

Below is an excerpt from my poem "On Inside Out" composed from the transcript of my very first interview with Julie in 2016 when she discussed the practical and psychological challenges of publishing a book based on her dissertation research. Julie's reaction to my poem illustrates the risk and the promise of deformative interpretation or cutting as it happens through TFP.

…

I was married to a guy and it ended
in a bad, violent way, living
in Mexico City, had to leave overnight.
Wrote the dissertation there.
Emotions wrapped up there.

Huge epiphany: if I finish this book …
that version of me is done.
I am not a student anymore.
I don't live in Mexico anymore.
Hardly anyone knows those things about me here,
So it's all gone.

…

In the margin of my poem, next to the line "I was married to a guy and it ended," Julie wrote:

> I'm writing this the day after our meeting. I'm reflecting this morning on what we discussed about how I felt sort of jarred or shocked when I saw these lines, but also felt that I trusted the poet and that this was created with care. It seems like, as you noted yesterday, my shock might come from seeing my "I" coming from someone else. Maybe this was the point in reading that I realized that you were not writing about me, as one of your many subjects, as a "she" or even a "you," but rather

> you were using my words to make sense out of the writing process. I'm trying to remember what it has felt like over the years to see my words reported in more traditional research articles you've written, and there was a sense of distance there, the anonymized name and the introduction that would accompany a quote. Here it is so direct. Not sure what to make of all this, but I wanted to note it.

Julie's vulnerability is palpable. She seems to feel exposed but also held, treated with care and intention. She was no longer "one of [my] many subjects … a 'she' or even a 'you'"; rather, her words became part of our collaborative sense-making effort.

As Restaino (2019) points out, coming to terms with cutting is essential for human-subjects researchers. "The destabilization of identity," she writes, "the fracturing of identity, and our subsequent containment of multiple selves … must function as indelible components of method in work that seeks to explore … the topics … that resist being fully 'knowable'" (p. 72)—unknowable topics like writing lives, writers in transition, humans living through radical change and paralyzing inertia, crisis and joy. Of researchers, Restaino (2019) observes, "whether acknowledged or not, we are always also cutters, taking apart not just our data and our research participants but also ourselves" (p. 129). Tandem found poetry holds researchers accountable for our role as cutters. At the same time, just as with Ono and her audience in *Cut Piece*, the mutual vulnerability of TFP, conjured through reciprocal acts of cutting, generates unexpected opportunities for beauty and connection. We lose track of who is writing whom, as the following poem, written by Julie from her 2019 interview transcripts, suggests.

Who Wrote This?

Who wrote this? It sounds like a real book.
Surprise! So many come across it.
Wait a minute, is it good?
    Who wrote this?

Could it be more than just adequate?
Shining a light -- that felt very cool.
Authority stole the show a bit.

Who's going to be there? Friends from school.
Receiving positive messages.
I'm not gonna lose my livelihood.
    Who wrote this?

Tandem found poetry offers one way to contend with the danger and promise of cutting because it ensures the "loving destruction" (Restaino, 2019, p. 72) is reciprocal. Julie and I both sliced and stitched our words. Together, we laid our poems next to one another and listened for their meaning, which was always both achingly concrete and provocatively abstract. Perhaps, in the words of Black woman scholar, educator, and leader, Cynthia Dillard (2003), ours was a "cutting to heal not to bleed." Dillard (2003) is writing in response to Handel Wright's response to her work on "an endarkened feminist epistemology," with an eye toward celebrating scholarly "response/critique as a way to open spaces and make connections across our situated differences" (p. 228). For Dillard (2003), critique is a form of cutting that can be delivered with the goal of knocking down, drawing blood, or in a spirit of "reciprocity" and "critical affirmation" (p. 231). In a similar vein, the cutting and remixing of words and meanings in TFP is always in service of collaborative inquiry. As with Ono's interactive performance art, my and Julie's poetic acts of "meaningful damage" (Restaino, 2019, p. 129) consummated our interconnectedness; we surrendered to uncertainty, the awareness that just as we would never entirely separate ourselves, nor would we fully know one another. I wrote the following found poem that appears in Julie's anthology using our 2021 interview transcript. It captures the spirit of loving, meaning, healing, and making at the heart of TFP.

Jotting Notes

Co-authoring relationships, co-translating
my friend, we see each other, dear
heart reflects whole story craving you,
believing we are good enough

Julie and I cut lines from our transcripts into pieces and reassembled them with slivers of ourselves holding them poetically together, forging something new, a fragmented whole greater than the sum of its parts. Our mutual cutting was both destructive and generative. With Restaino (2019), I see in the generative act of cutting potential for subversive knowledge making:

> In our cutting and even in our eventual, sometimes reassembling, we do meaningful damage and have an opportunity to feel something at once terrifying and inexplicable …. This is about exposing our handiwork, its ultimate futility, and … such exposure is double-sided: we are simultaneously limited in our capacity to understand and render the other, and ourselves. The harder we try, in fact, the greater damage we do. How, as researcher-writers, might we contend with this danger? How might we do it justice and honor (recognize?) our capacity for

> harm? To what extent might such danger—and the risk-taking it invites—invent new kinds of knowledge, texts, and ways of doing research? (p. 129)

Reflecting on the poem "Jotting Notes," Julie suggests one response to Restaino's (2019) questions. She wrote, "I love this: 'co-translation' working together to understand ourselves as we reflect each other back to one another, analyze ourselves and each other." Julie considered the risk and invention involved in TFP in terms of translation, a practice she knew well in her scholarly life:

> That's what we're doing, too. We have these words to start from. We're not just like "write a poem about what it's like to be a faculty writer." And then editing in a translation is a similar problem. Here it's like: "Well, do you kind of make it your own at this point? Or do you need to go back to the original and see?" At what point is it an inspiration, and not a translation? At what point is it no longer the original thing it's really a new thing that you've made from that thing?

Here, tensions at the heart of translation theory and practice as well as questions about the role of the translator and the relationship between original and translated texts become a lens for grappling with the peril and promise of knowledge making in the TFP process. Of course, *translation* in the context of TFP is not a matter of translating a text from one language to another as it is in Julie's scholarly translation work, but the connection she makes surfaces new ways of pondering meaning, accuracy, interpretation, and creative activity.

Most translation theorists admit that discrepancy between the original and translated text will always exist (Bassnett, 2014). French linguist and translator Georges Mounin went so far as to indicate that "personal experience in its uniqueness is untranslatable" (Bassnett, 2014, p. 45). If "equivalence in translation" is an impossible feat, elaborates translation theorists Susan Bassnett (2014), then the goal of translation should never be a "search for sameness" (p. 39). Every translation, like every research poem, is to some extent an invention, unique in its own right (Bassnett, 2014). It follows that, as Julie suggests, the TFP process is much like translation in that it has the potential to "enrich or clarify" (Bassnett, 2014, p. 39) the original sentiment or even say something completely new.

I've found this to be true with poetic inquiry more generally. When I share found poems based on interview transcripts with the faculty writers in my study, they discover new "truths," new meanings that have various connections to the original words spoken during our interviews. They appreciate seeing their words offered back to them and seem less concerned with "accuracy" or "correctness" per se. In my research poems, participants see their words and experiences in a new light. They are consistently intrigued and usually delighted by the resonant feelings and sense of surprise the poems incite.

The lens of translation underscores the possibility of new knowledge making as well as the danger of overwriting meanings and experiences embedded in original texts with the translator's intentions and sense making. Sharing poems with my research participants and engaging in processes like reverse interviewing (Chapter 3) are some ways I mitigate such dangers as a poetic inquirer. Perhaps more than any other approach to poetic inquiry, the TFP process directly reckons with the precarity and promise of poetically translating lived experience. It resists the "illusion of transparency" (Bassnett, 2014, p. 46) which can plague translation as well as qualitative data analysis, by making visible the translator-cutter-poet and privileging collaborative meaning making. As Julie's term *co-translation* suggests, TFP invites researcher and participant to actively make meaning together with and from one another's words. In doing so, we come to understand ourselves, each other, and the realities of faculty writing lives differently.

Julie's reflection on translation beautifully captures the potential violence, magic, and promise of generating knowledge through TFP. Her inclination, as a scholarly translator, to play with translation as a metaphor for our collaborative work illustrates another valuable dimension of the method—not only does TFP invite participants to draw on our unique subjectivities to make meaning together, but it also inspires us to apply our individual lenses (rooted in our unique experiences and expertise) to determine how the process works. Each instance of TFP, then, will unfold differently based on the humans involved and thus uncover new ways of understanding and embracing the process itself. Because the practice of TFP varies according to the people who engage it, the possibilities unearthed through the practice vary widely as well.

I like to think of the poems we composed and the feelings and insights that emerged for me and Julie through our experience with TFP as gifts. In their contribution to the collection *Weaving an Otherwise: In-Relations Methodological Practice,* Christine A. Nelson and Heather J. Shotton (2022) conceptualize gifting "as a collective and decolonial process that can begin to extend what answerability means in research" (p. 94). Grounded in the significance of gifting in Indigenous communities, their version of the practice resists performative, transactional, capitalistic views of gift-giving. Instead, inspired by Anishinaabe scholar Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013), they frame gifting in the research context as "relational, rooted in responsibility and reciprocity" (Nelson & Shotton, 2022, p. 96). Collaborative research poetry offers a uniquely fitting form for gifting that "bring[s] life to what answerability in the academy is" (Nelson & Shotton, 2022, p. 96) in part because it resists "compartmentalization and categorization" (p. 97), exuding instead a wholeness and mutual accountability that "allows us to be innately connected to the research process" (p. 94). When Nelson and Shotton (2022) personify "Gift" as a third author of their chapter, they animate that voice through poetry. Indeed, participants in my study including Julie (and Mandy, see Chapter 3) received as gifts found poems I created from their transcripts. The process of tandem found poetry illuminates this quality.

Benefits of Tandem Found Poetry: Some Possibilities

Tandem found poetry highlights the potential of research poems to become gifts that cultivate "shared knowledge through time and story" (Nelson & Shotton, 2022, p. 96) and "creat[e] a collective and healing space within the research process" (p. 94). Nelson and Shotton's (2022) notion of healing is part of a cultural frame rooted in Indigenous communities and Indigenous storytelling. While the TFP experience Julie and I shared does not necessarily share that frame, healing was a significant feature of our collaboration. In what follows, I highlight some of the gifts TFP offered us in order to suggest a range of possible benefits and outcomes. In doing so, I hope to inspire writing studies researchers and participants to imagine when, why, and how TFP might be a promising approach for shared inquiry in their unique contexts.

Healing Through Multiple Truths

As I've shown, the goal of TFP is not to accurately capture an elusive truth, to objectively portray what a research participant "means" by a comment, story, or reflection, or to present a researcher's final conclusions supported by data-based evidence. Rather, the "found-ness" of research poems, the innovativeness of cross-pollination, the generative destruction of cutting constitute new ways of thinking, feeling, and being that spawn multiple truths, myriad ways to remember, to understand ourselves and our experiences past, present, and future.

Runyan (2021) explains how found poetry generates new knowledge in the form of surprising, uncertain truths; found poets, she explains, like muralists "'doubl[e] the context' of their inspiration" (p. 142), recombining images and symbols to draw readers into new perspectives and create a feeling that is both tethered to and unique from the experience and context from which it was torn. Julie describes the thrill of discovering new feelings and perspectives in past experiences re-rendered through TFP:

> It's when I'm seeing it [my words and experiences] in a new light, like I didn't hear it that way right? But it seems true, it does ring true ... I think it's often when it's something surprises me, or when it really captures a feeling, and I'll think, wow, I said that but I didn't realize how that can sound or what it meant, or what was the beneath it.

Indeed, Julie was less interested in poems we wrote that seemed to accurately represent her memory of an original feeling or thought. She continued,

> Not the ones that are like "Oh, that captured what I was feeling back then, exactly." … So it's less for me, I mean probably for another reader, it would be interesting. But for me, it's kind of like, "oh, yeah." But then, when it's like, "Oh! I add that word, I use that word a bunch of times. Or oh, like those two things go

> together, you know, and I didn't realize that—that's more what gets me … my brain likes.

Embracing the new, the unexpected, the insights that felt true in ways that had little to do with the original interview or experience required us to admit the futility of knowing once and for all, to relinquish deluded hope of deciphering the truth. It meant surrendering to the art of poetic practice and "the elusive intensity by which it knows" (Hirshfield, 1997, p. 5). For example, Julie was enchanted to find her "interview" self to be a provocatively unreliable source:

> I was really not trustworthy to me in that transcript and yet that's what this whole thing is based on, me telling you things I remembered, and, but, and it's meaningful. So this very shifty source is producing a meaningful experience that helps me to move forward and helps me reflect.

Grappling with "shifty" variations of the truth prompted meaningful reflection for Julie as she reveled in the multitude of meanings conjured by uncertain memories.

Poetry is a natural vehicle for exploding familiar ways of knowing, for as poet Jane Hirshfield (1997) explains "if 'truth' is a chosen narrative, then new stories, new aesthetics, are also new truths" (p. 5). Sometimes, exposure to new truths had a healing effect for Julie, who was in the midst of a major life transition—leaving her tenured position in academia. Consider the following poem Julie wrote from our 2021 interview transcript:

Second Act

Is an earthquake a shift or a settling?
Life and death fear
An opening up
Gotta get out of here
Committed
Traumatic Break
Integrity, connection
Invite attacks
Write something true
Anxiety troll
A little more courage

A limitless situation.
Things can fall apart,
you'll still be there.

During our conversations, Julie explained that "an earthquake" (stanza 1, line 1) had long been an important symbol for her usually tied to anxiety. However, the poem had her thinking differently about what the earthquake feeling could mean in her life:

> The earthquake … for me is such an important symbol, … I moved to California, and the very first day of orientation, there was an earthquake … . Then I moved to Mexico City, and … I got so anxious … that I regularly didn't know if it was an earthquake, or if it was from inside of me, and I would always look at the lamp to see if the pull string was shaking or not. And then, when I moved to Oklahoma … it was the same thing. Pre tenure I had that earthquake anxiety, and I would ... look outside of me to see is this me or is this the earth? So [the] idea that it could be something settling into place is very comforting.

Writing the found poem and discussing it with me was a source of healing for Julie during a tumultuous time of transition as she began to reimagine the symbolism of the earthquake, a metaphor that had shaped ways of living and perceiving her life. Many qualitative researchers are committed to honoring multiple truths by de-centering researcher perspectives, and TFP offers an intentional, methodological process for activating those commitments, one with the potential to cultivate healing by honoring layered and evolving truths.

(Re) Tracing Hope and Joy

Just as Julie and I appreciated new angles and ways of seeing prompted by the TFP process, Julie was particularly delighted when traces of dear memories from our original interviews re-emerged in our poems, when certain remembrances were honored and re-enforced. She was struck by the reemergence of things she "remembered just for [her]self." Take for example the heart-shaped sunglasses that appear in the diamante poem I wrote from Julie's 2019 interview transcript.

Confidence
Braver clothing
Wear one weird thing a day.
Please my imagination heart sunglasses they'll laugh
even strangers. I like that. Hint: don't be serious.
Ok? Closer to
Affectionate

Reflecting on the poem, Julie considered how the words from the transcript, reiterated in the poem, reflected aspects of her past, newly tenured self and still resonated with her in the present moment:

> I think I was like a person going through: What does it mean when you can be yourself differently, and the playfulness? That conversation was what I remembered even before I went back and read the transcript. So it was really fun when I came upon it again. Well, this needs a like a doubling. Needs a space.

Julie describes the effect of encountering the concrete, playful image of her heart-shaped sunglasses as a "doubling," for which TFP created space. Her description invokes the resonance of TFP with rescue poetry rooted in counselling practice. Penwarden (2017) explains how rescue poetry, writing poems from speech during therapy sessions, emerged from narrative therapy in which the therapist "'double listen[s]' to a person's narrative to hear both the dominant story of the problem they face and an alternative story that carries thin traces of their values and hopes for their life" (p. 226). The image of the sunglasses in my diamante poem manifested for Julie an underlying story that bore traces of who she was and wanted to be—a playful, lively person unafraid to be seen, who delights in others' delight. The poem took Julie back to a moment of self-invention when she was reaching for ways to be herself, to reclaim aspects of herself that she'd felt compelled to bury during her journey to earning tenure.

In this case, the TFP process magnified joyful memories of Julie's experience of feeling at home in her skin, of being seen. It invited her to sink back into a moment and a story that was originally important to her, to experience it anew, and linger there. Hirshfield (1997) explains how poetry facilitates such an experience that is at once transcendent and material: "Through poetry's concentration great sweeps of thought, emotion, and perception are compressed to forms the mind is able to hold—into images, sentences, and stories that serve as entrance tokens to large and often slippery realms of being" (pp. 6-7). The image of the heart-shaped sunglasses was a lively reminder of Julie's commitment to aligning *who* she was with *how* she was in life.

Throughout Julie's journey in and eventually beyond academia she doggedly fought for a path, a life, in which she could be the fullest version of herself, where she could live with integrity. Looking back to see that feisty, confident version of herself emerging before she'd even decided to resign from her tenured faculty position stoked her spirit when she read the poem after leaving academia. Precious affirmations of self can be rare when we are in the midst of struggle and change. The surprise and delight of discovering them can bolster persistence in challenging situations by keeping alive self-trust, the hope needed to continue to imagine how things might be other than they are.

Tracking Transformation: Honoring Multiple Versions of Life

The recursive nature of the TFP process unraveling over time created a unique opportunity for self-reflection, for re-seeing and re-narrating stories of self. Poetry is an ideal process and medium for cultivating deep, transformative reflection because of how it moves within and across time. Prendergast (2006) celebrates "the unique ability" (p. 369) of poetry "to capture and present aspects of the past (in memory), present (in experience), and future (in hope/fear)" (pp. 369-370). Hirshfield (1997) observes the "startling intimacy" of reading poetry that captivates the attention of mind and body across moments in time: "We breathe as the author breathed, we move our own tongue and teeth and throat in the ways they moved in the poem's first making" (p. 8). According to Hirshfield (1997), in those intimate moments an "echo" of the poet comes to us through the poem, and "if the poem is our own, it is our own past that reinhabits our bodies, at least in part" (p. 8). As Julie and I wrote poems with one another's words and then read the poems we crafted—alone and together—we inhabited past and future versions of ourselves and each other. Poetry is transcendent, Hirshfield (1997) explains, for "shaped language is strangely immortal, living in a meadowy freshness outside of time" (p. 8). And yet …

Poetry also "lives in the moment, in us. Emotion, intellect, and physiology are inseparably connected in the links of a poem's sound" (Hirshfield, 1997, p. 8). That is, poetry brings us into our full being, a palimpsest of selves bearing traces of the past, landing in the present, gazing toward the future. "The repetition and changes of a poem's prosody are the outward face of inner transformation," Hirshfield (1997) expounds; "unfolding their tensions and resolutions, a poem's sounds make of experience a shapeliness, with beginning, middle, and end" always in motion across the page (pp. 8-9). It is this movement within and across time through which poetry honors multiple selves and celebrates transformation even as it preserves essential elements of who we (think we) are.

"You're living multiple versions of a life in your transcripts" Julie told me, as we reflected on poems crafted from her 2020 interview. She captured that very sentiment in the only poem she wrote from our 2022 interview transcript. Her concrete poem looks like a rope or thread slinking down the margin, one-word lines interrupted at various intervals by a circling back, words forming loops on the page. In her anthology, Julie created an accordion of pages that unfolds to reveal the full poem, which takes up several pages. Here is an excerpt:

Reviving
your
older
old
self
barking

in
the
background
wound
tight
struggling
with
spinning
wheels
explain
to
myself

Did you do
this right?
Did you
do that? Are you
taking
your medicine?
Should you
have done
this? Are you
doing therapy?

a
disengaging
act
exodus
sinking
ship
the
last
woman
there
none
replaced
toxic
chicken

and
toxic
egg

The poem tracks Julie's transformation over time, looping forward and back across versions of herself and her sensemaking as she moved toward a momentous life change. Reflecting on her poem, Julie explained:

> I felt like this one [2022 interview transcript] was really looking back far, and was like tracing through the whole history in a way. It was also very weird to read it, because it was very recent. And yet an enormous change has taken place in in the meantime … this thread idea was important to me. I'm just gonna make one long—the words are the thread. And then I tried to make loops in it with these questions.

Through her concrete poem, Julie visually and viscerally recreated the recursive experience of living through a major life transition and then revisiting her evolving perceptions of moments big and small making up that trajectory. Each memory, each story re-framed the original experience and blazed a path to future experiences shaped by the living and storying happening in the present. Julie's poem crystalizes an idea she articulated much earlier, when we met to reflect on poems written from her 2019 interview transcript— "the idea that reflection is part of development, that the way we understand our past changes with time and affects the trajectory/plan we are constantly constructing." Her poem demonstrates how the act of writing TFP focused our telescoping attention, soaking us in the sensation of multitudes, and simultaneously rooted us in images and insights we could hold, even if fleetingly.

The invaluable gifts that emerged from my and Julie's experience of TFP—healing through multiple truths, (re)tracing hope, and tracking transformation—demonstrate how this approach is about more than representing data or lived experience. Rather, as in Penwarden's (2017) work, TFP is "both generative and transformative"; by "capturing and returning the [liminal moments] back to participants," found research poems, like poetic listening during therapy sessions, can help "them see their lives in a different light" (p. 230). Recursively re-narrating stories of the past in collaboration with a fellow poetic listener crystalizes lived experience as light refracting through the planes of a diamond prism, engendering new insights about past struggles and successes, and envisioning astonishing new possibilities for the future.

Conclusion

At its core, TFP is an intimate process of relationship-building that invites mutual vulnerability and collaborative meaning making, challenges hierarchical

dynamics that characterize traditional qualitative research, and richly complicates the creation, analysis, and representation of data (Burdick, 2011). Growth-fostering relationships established through TFP cultivate "the courage to bring [one] self more fully into relationship and into creative action," which is a vital experience according to feminist psychologist Jordan (2008), in a world where so many are plagued by chronic disconnection (p. 221). As I've shown, reciprocally vulnerable relationships like these also make possible new knowledge "as we come to know ourselves and the world differently through poetry" (Penwarden, 2017, p. 227). In this chapter I've shared several forms the gift of new knowledge can take, and I look forward to discovering new possibilities with each iteration of the practice. Although TFP is an inherently responsive, adaptable process, Julie and I agree the following actions seemed essential:

- reflecting on experiences in communication/relationship with another person
- investing in learning with/from/about one another
- collaboratively creating something new from existing material
- committing to an iterative process that takes place over time
- letting time pass between creating source texts, writing poems, and analyzing results
- having experience or seeking guidance around writing poetry
- considering poems within and beyond their original context

Embracing these tentative guidelines would be a good place to start for writing researchers committed to, in Restaino's (2019) words, "work that undoes us" (p. 74), who long for methodological surrender, and crave methods that lead somewhere other than where we've always been, methods that invite us to know, be, and do differently.

At the same time, TFP has potential for contexts beyond qualitative research. Julie suggested the process could work for "high performance people [i.e. athletes, musicians] who are able to perform even when it's hurting them or costing them a lot … similar to academics." Given the healing potential of TFP, we also see promise for people processing different types of trauma or significant life change, for the work of poetic concentration is a labor of love that "brings replenishment even to the writer dealing with painful subjects or working out problems, and there are times when suffering's only open path is through an immersion in what is" (Hirshfield, 1997, p. 5). For people in prison, for example, or new parents, Julie imagines "that poems would help make some things more approachable or more possible to talk about." She proposed that TFP could be "a way to simultaneously acknowledge and honor traumatic experiences and also make something out of them that is not requiring the person to use it for good. But it's just making something new that helps you understand it."

Tandem found poetry could work across a range of contexts in part because poetry is such an accessible art. Participants need not have rigorous training

or experience writing poetry to benefit from the practice. Julie described how similar her process of creating found poems was to a format we learned while teaching for Poetic Justice, a non-profit organization that sponsors restorative writing workshops for incarcerated women. Julie described the process this way:

> Do a brainstorm or a free write … making a game for yourself. Okay, now pick out 10 words and you have to use them in this song. Or you have to use those 10 words in a sonnet or something. And so there's these … game rules, are what I use in regular poetry composition too.

Facilitators could easily offer a range of playful constraints or "game rules" to support poetic play. The following is a partial list of contexts beyond qualitative research where TFP may be valuable:

- teaching/teacher development
- activist groups building community and persisting through exhaustion
- faculty development
- life coaching
- burnout support groups for employees
- leadership training
- community writing groups

Source texts for creating found poems could vary according to the context and needs of participants. Possibilities include letters, emails, teaching materials, journals, diaries, academic writing, testimonies, and transcripts. Participants could also interview one another and create poems from loose notes or transcriptions.

Finally, in considering future uses and adaptations for TFP, it is important to acknowledge that Julie and I have a lot in common—we are white, early middle aged, middle class, married women with bodies usually enabled by the systems and structures within which we move. We live and work on the traditional homeland of the "Hasinais" Caddo Nation and "Kirikirʔiːs" Wichita & Affiliated Tribes.[19] I am an uninvited settler on this land. Julie is a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma; both of her parents are members of tribes, neither of which were invited to Oklahoma, both of which were forced here; she acknowledges settler ancestors. Julie and I both have PhDs. Our situatedness matters, for as Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish's (2010) work on "radical imagination" reminds us, "Our imaginations might look very different depending on where we stand in relation to social power relations" (p. xviii), that is, depending our differences. "Our sense of what is possible and what is imaginable," they continue invoking feminist theorists Marcel Stoetzler and Nira Yuval-Davis, "is shaped by our privilege, our experience of exploitation and how we are intersected by vectors of

19. Open http://www.wichitatribe.com/media/18910/wichita.mp3 to hear the pronunciation of this word.

oppression like racism, sexism, class, ableism, or citizenship status" (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2010, p. xviii). Engaging in TFP intensifies my awareness that human "imaginations are constrained by our circumstances and experiences" (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 23), and reminds me that "the labour of imagining beyond one's own situatedness is difficult and never finished" (p. 24). I am hopeful, therefore, that TFP might be one mechanism for investing in such vital labor, might become a way of surfacing, honoring, and dreaming across difference so as to expand what is imaginable. I hope the process unfolded and mined in this chapter inspires researchers and others hungry for relational meaning making and reflexive praxis to feel their way into unique iterations of this fruitful poetic practice.

Conclusion: Poetic Inquiry as an Ethic of Attunement

In *Arts-Based Research Methods in Writing Studies: A Primer*, Kate Hanzalik (2021) predicts a promising future for arts-based research in writing studies: "Artistic ways of knowing," she argues, "can stir emotions, encourage empathy and self-inquiry, promote openness to ambiguity, and encourage people to act, all of which are important for WS [writing studies] at a time when learning, teaching, social justice, and individual well-being are all at stake" (p. 102). Previous chapters in this book have demonstrated how particular approaches to poetic inquiry, one of many arts-based research practices, can achieve those ends. Although poetic inquiry is not appropriate for every research context and question, it does offer a range of "flexible, recursive, and open-ended" approaches that can meaningfully "disrup[t] conventional research standards" (Hanzalik, 2021, p. 102). Indeed, because poetry reveals the deepest parts of humanity, poetic inquiry has been employed in hundreds of published studies by qualitative researchers across disciplines and from around the globe (Prendergast, 2009; Galvin & Prendergast, 2016; van Rooyen & Pithouse-Morgan, 2024) to theorize from "flesh and blood experiences" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 19), capture the "livedness" (Furman et al., 2007, p. 302) of diverse physical realities, and consider conditions of living in all their multidimensional complexity. With roots in theories of the flesh, poetic inquiry conjures abstract, multivalent meaning, attends to silence, evokes emotion, and articulates human experience that doesn't "fit" dominant ways of knowing, being, or doing. In short, poetic inquiry lends itself to the complexities of writing research and can support the goals and commitments of many writing studies researchers dedicated to critical feminist praxis and transformative justice.

Over a decade ago, reflecting on contributions to the foundational collection *Writing Studies Research in Practice: Methods and Methodologies* (Nickoson & Sheridan, 2012), Rebecca J. Rickly proposed that "new (and 'messy') contexts" involved in researching writing might well call for "new (and 'messy') methods" (p. 262). Citing sociologist John Law (2004), Rickly (2012) explains that when our research problems and contexts are "'complex, diffuse and messy' … then we need to 'find ways of knowing the indistinct and the slippery without trying to grasp and hold them tight'" (p. 262). Of course, the messiness of writing research contexts has only intensified in the wake of the "dual pandemics" of COVID-19 and increased attention to systemic racial injustice (Yeh et al., 2022, p. 2366), historical shifts in the nature and future of higher education, and "unfathomable upheaval, rising out of … concurrent social, economic, racial, and political reckonings that continue to exert extreme tolls on (all of) our lives" (Tachine & Nicolazzo, 2022a, p. 3). Given that the research practices we choose "not only describe but also help to *produce* the reality that they understand" (Law, 2004, p. 5), if we

crave alternative realities, "we need to go beyond a traditional understanding of methods/methodologies to (as Law asserts) 'teach ourselves to think, to practice, to relate, and to know in new ways'" (Rickly, 2012, p. 262). Amanda R. Tachine and Z Nicolazzo's collection *Weaving an Otherwise: In-Relations Methodological Practice* (2022b) offers possibilities toward that end by honoring the "interconnectedness of storytelling" and the "creative energies" involved in embracing qualitative methodologies that "align research with our heart, values, visions, and hopes" (Tachine & Nicolazzo, 2022a, p. 2). I humbly suggest, and hopefully have demonstrated throughout this book, that poetic inquiry can meaningfully contribute to this project.

Sandra Faulkner (2020) outlines when and why qualitative researchers might turn to poetic inquiry, citing examples of researchers who illustrate each exigence:

- when they feel that other modes of representation will not capture what they desire to show about their work and research participants (Faulkner, 2005; Reale, 2015),
- when they wish to explore knowledge claims and write with more engagement and connection (Denzin, 1997; Pelias 2005; L. Richardson, 1997),
- when the researcher's story intersects or entwines with research participants' lives (Behar, 2008; Krizek, 2003),
- to mediate different understandings (Leggo, 2008),
- to present embodied experience (Ellingson, 2017; Faulkner, 2018c; Snowber, 2016), and
- to reach more diverse audiences (L. Richardson, 2002). (p. 17)

Reading over this list, I am struck by how the goals and commitments of so many writing researchers could be bolstered with poetic inquiry. It's surprising how few writing studies scholars publicly claim poetic inquiry as part of their methodological repertoire, especially given the commitment of so many in our field to developing innovative methods that meaningfully challenge cis, white, Eurocentric, male, hetero, notions of writing, rhetoric, knowledge, and academia—methods such as academic memoir (Inoue, 2021; Rose, 2005; Villanueva, 1993; Yergeau, 2018); methodological surrender (Restaino, 2019); counterstory (Martinez, 2020; Treviño & Ozias, 2022), quilting (Arellano, 2021), feminist filmmaking (Hidalgo, 2017), "research as care" (Novotny & Gagnon, 2018), mixtap/e/ssay (Carson, 2017, 2024), and what Gabriela Raquel Rìos calls bruja methodology (works in progress) to name a few. Many of these examples are also arts-forward, demonstrating, along with collections like *Exquisite Corpse: Studio Arts-Based Wring in the Academy* (Hanzalik & Virgintino, 2019), that performative forms of research and pedagogy are indeed happening in writing studies (Hanzalik, 2021). By advocating for and modeling poetic inquiry as a critical, feminist methodology in the context of writing studies, *Research is the Poetry* joins this body of work in exploring arts-based ways to challenge stock stories of writers and writing, to honor and learn from those not typically supported by dominant systems,

structures, and institutions. I've found poetic inquiry to be one way among many to make "qualitative research … a profound space/time/feeling through which we weave otherwises" (Tachine & Nicolazzo, 2022a, p. 10), and I hope to have inspired researchers to try it for themselves.

Toward that end, I've theorized and demonstrated ways qualitative writing studies researchers might experiment with poetic inquiry. I've described how I came to the method as a post-tenure researcher looking to reignite my passion for the work. I've summarized debates about criteria for poetic inquiry processes and products and shared my own frameworks for intuiting when poetic inquiry might be a promising path, for knowing when I was on the right track, and for gauging success. In each chapter, I've explained what brought me to a particular approach to poetic inquiry, outlined the steps I took to feel my way into the method, acknowledged the resources that supported my efforts, and presented and analyzed some poems at the heart of my inquiries. If you are intrigued by what poetic inquiry offers, I urge you to dive in; don't wait until you feel confident or sure. Follow your intuition, seek out examples, read about practices and approaches, enroll in workshops and join conference sessions that expose you to possibilities and opportunities to experiment in the company of generous colleagues who will think creatively and hold you accountable.

I am sympathetic to those new to poetic inquiry who might crave more explicit guidance, a clear way forward. Many resources exist with exercises to try and heuristics for reflecting on poetic inquiry experiments—Faulkner (2020) and vanRooyen and d'Abdon (2025) are two of my favorites. At the same time, I hesitate to outline specific steps. Every context is different, each researcher-writer-poet is unique. Poetic inquiry is about more expansive ways of thinking, being, and doing. It is ripe with potential for researchers of all kinds—graduate students new to qualitative research and qualitative researchers new to poetry, mid and late career faculty feeling stifled by their training and rigid disciplinary norms, those in any career stage who feel judged, discouraged, excluded, or pushed out because traditional approaches to writing and research just don't "fit" for them. How can I presume to articulate the best path for every researcher? Thus, in the spirit of *Weaving an Otherwise* (2022), I offer this book as "more of a compass and a reveal than guidebook" (Patel, 2022, p. xi). I hope readers find in my approaches to poetic inquiry many of the qualities Patel (2022) sees in the contributions to *Weaving an Otherwise*, and I invite you to linger in the "folds and stretches" (p. xi), to dwell in the "loops and twists" (p. xi), to imagine possibilities "while cooking, while walking, while resting, while grieving, while living" (p. xii). Like the counsel Margaret Kovach (2009) gifted a young student craving guidance in choosing Indigenous methodologies, my best advice is to "start where you are, it will take you where you need to go" (p. 10).

In conclusion, I highlight four interlocking dimensions of methodological surrender with/through poetic inquiry: rhetorical, pedagogical, ethical, and material. In what follows, I reiterate how poetic inquiry enlivened these dimensions in my own research project by scaffolding new ways of listening and in so

doing changed the trajectory of my writing and research; the essence of who I am as a researcher, writer, and human; and the potential for who I can be/come in and through my work. In the process, I hope to crystalize the transformative, subversive potential of poetic inquiry and spark the imagination of researchers considering experimenting with or deepening the use of poetic inquiry practices in their own unique contexts.

Poetic Inquiry Is a Rhetorical Project

The decision to incorporate poetic inquiry practices into a research project is a methodological one, to be sure. It is also a commitment to a particular rhetorical orientation. According to Restaino (2015), the "relinquishing of control" that comes with methodological surrender, in this case through poetic inquiry, "is founded upon a willingness to hear and feel what emerges rhetorically and to continue to follow even in uncertainty" (p. 83). Although I find uncertainty terrifying, poetic inquiry, the nature of poetry and the kind of mind-body-spirit experience it conjures, helps me see "rhetorical value in the unknowable" (Restaino, 2019, p. 54); it gives me faith in a rhetorical orientation that feels unfamiliar and scary, yet urgent and necessary.

Poetic inquiry throws into relief and into question what I hope comes of my work, my rhetorical purpose. I believe with Waite (2017) that conventional approaches will only ever say conventional things and, conversely, "that changing our patterns of thought can change the world" (p.189). Oleksiak's (2020b) invitation to contributors in his introduction to the *Peitho* Cluster Conversation "Queering Rhetorical Listening" captures the promise of poetic inquiry for working rhetorically toward transformative ends. With the goal of pursuing more radical openness and "an unending commitment to be transforming," Oleksiak (2020b) invited contributors to write in the spirit of feminist scholars like Restaino (2019), Becky Thompson (2017), and Lisa Blankenship (2019) with "more kindness and generosity of spirit as we reach toward each other." In my view, poetic inquiry heeds that call. It invites writing researchers to listen differently—to ourselves, to each other, to the human beings at the heart of our projects—and to write in ways that inspire readers to do the same, manifesting for all of us "more generous patterns of living" (Ervin, 1999, p. 323).

Poetic Inquiry Is a Pedagogical Project

Not only is methodological surrender through poetic inquiry a rhetorical project, it is also pedagogical one. As I've explained elsewhere (Tarabochia, 2017) my understanding of pedagogy is rooted in the work of Chris Gallagher (2002), Paul Kameen (2000), Amy Lee (2000), Donna Qualley (1997), and Shari Stenberg (2005), among others; I see pedagogy as "an inquiry-based process of collaborative meaning making undertaken by teacher-learners" in contexts including and

beyond traditional classrooms (Tarabochia, 2017, p. 7). Pedagogy is epistemic—a process of "shared knowledge building" (Gallagher, 2002, p. xvi); reflexive—a practice "of turning back to discover, examine, and critique one's claims and assumptions in response to an encounter with another idea, text, person or culture" (Qualley, 1997, p. 3); and relational—a "collective activity" that has to be made and remade among particular people in particular contexts (Stenberg, 2005, p. xviii). My use of poetic inquiry is a pedagogical project in that I set out to embrace the processes, practices, and actions inherent in a pedagogical stance and beckon readers to join me in the endeavor.

Poetic inquiry models and invites readers to embrace what Stenberg (2011) calls, "a pedagogy of listening" (p. 251), a theorized enactment an extension of Ratcliffe's rhetorical listening. Invoking Heidegger and Gemma Corradi Fiumara (1990), Stenberg (2011) explains that when we are immersed in a pedagogy of listening we "let something lie before us, not to accumulate another's ideas but to safely keep them, to provide shelter for what has been gathered" (p. 252). By enacting a pedagogy of listening, poetic inquiry subverts traditional methods of meaning making and knowledge production. Too often in academic culture "others' ideas are seized, appropriated, and discarded according to a predetermined agenda" (Stenberg, 2011, p. 252). In the context of my interest in faculty writers, I've observed this tendency in the academic success literature focused on distilling best practices of productive, publishing scholars into lessons for struggling writers. For me, poetic inquiry offers an alternative, a way of "laying-to-let-lie-before—[of] listening—[that] requires us [researchers, writers, and readers] to nurture, tend to, and safely keep that which we engage" (Stenberg, 2011, p. 252). It is a relational practice of teaching and learning through difference, attending to self-in-relation-with-others.

Poetic Inquiry Is an Ethical Project

In addition to being a rhetorical and a pedagogical project, poetic inquiry is an ethical project. It is ethical in the sense that a poetic approach calls researchers to reflexively and recursively ponder and name the values and principles we want to drive not only our writing and research but also the way we move in the world. Main chapters of this book demonstrate how I have engaged with poetic inquiry, identify techniques I've used, model processes, and speculate about the value of each approach. I hope they also make clear the extent to which poetic inquiry, as part of a feminist ethic—rooted in commitments to intersectionality, diverse perspectives and multiple truths, material lives and embodied experiences—can compel researchers to embrace our ethical obligations as writers, researchers and humans holding fellow humans at the heart of our projects. As Jennifer E. Potter (2015) points out, theorizing about lives, people, identities …

> without exploring the lived experience of one's own identity does not engage the heart of the issue, nor does it add theoretical

> insight. Theorizing through self-exploration and reflexivity, however, creates the potential for a much more nuanced and complex approach to explaining the contextualization of individuals within a larger social construct. (p. 1436)

In that spirit, as I hope I've shown, poetic inquiry holds space for ethical work, for "theorizing through self-exploration and reflexivity" in pursuit of the nuanced insight Potter describes.

Particularly in chapters on collaborative poetry, cluster poetry, and poetic approaches to deep listening, including reverse interview and I-poems, my poems and reflections show not just what poetic inquiry looks like, but also what it *feels* like in practice, in all its muddled messiness, as I attempt to hold myself accountable—to writers in my study, to readers, to myself—by reckoning with who I am in this work. Educational researcher H. Richard Milner IV (2007) argues that danger lurks when researchers forego such reckoning, when we do nothing to "circumvent misinterpretations, misinformation, misrepresentation of individuals, communities, institutions, systems" (p. 388). As a qualitative researcher, I feel the gravity of this possibility acutely. Milner (2007) offers a Framework of Researcher Racial and Cultural Positionality to guide researchers in navigating dangers "seen, unseen, and unforeseen" (p. 394), which involves "researching the self, researching the self in relation to others, engaged reflection and representation, and shifting from self to system" (pp. 394-395). I gravitate toward poetic inquiry in part because it prompts critical reflective work in each of these areas. It forces me to attend differently to important research decisions along with "unanticipated or unpredicted" outcomes of my choices, especially "those that are hidden, covert, implicit, or invisible" of which I may be initially unconscious (Milner, 2007, p. 388).

For example, I did not deliberately structure my research on faculty to interrogate social categories; I did not establish comparative samples to determine "the social significance of interlocking systems of oppression" (Cuádraz & Uttal, 1999, p. 170). However, as Gloria Holguín Cuádraz and Lynet Uttal (1999) point out, ignoring the existence of social categories in interview-based studies creates a methodological dilemma, "a false approach that assumes equality and that individuals have been exposed to equal opportunities and conditions" (p. 170). Like Cuádraz and Uttal (1999), I wanted "to understand individual stories" of research participants *and* "bring in the sociocultural context within which their [/our] lives [were] taking place" (p. 171). Like them, I turned to feminist in-depth interviewing, which "encouraged individuals to explain how they viewed their circumstances, to define issues in their own terms, to identify processes leading to different outcomes, and to interpret the meaning of their lives" (p. 160) along with me. I found that poetic inquiry both aligned with my approach to data collection and my desire to "respect the data enough to follow it into relevant social dimensions without imposing the race, class, and gender matrix on

the data" (Cuádraz & Uttal, 1999, p. 165) Approaches to poetic inquiry—such as reverse interview poems and cluster poems, for instance—provide an opportunity to "problematiz[e] the lack of critical stance" toward difference—when the lack occurs in participants' as well as researchers' stories—and "ma[k]e its taken-for-grantedness an explicit part of the analysis" (Cuádraz & Uttal, 1999, p. 171) by honoring and probing the sociocultural context of our lives.

Poetic Inquiry Is a Material Project

Just as the act of methodological surrender through poetic inquiry is a rhetorical, pedagogical, and ethical project it is also a material, embodied one, for it "is in many ways an exercise in destabilizing bodies (and 'bodies' can include researcher-participant bodies but also bodies of data and text) and coming to know these bodies as capable of illness, destruction, loss, and not-knowing" (Restaino, 2019, pp. 14-15). There is a danger in rhetoric and writing studies, says Michael J. Faris (2020), in "privileg[ing] the discursive and epistemic at the expense of the embodied and material." Poetic inquiry as a form and practice has the potential to "disrup[t] traditional binaries between discursivity and materiality, challenging us to see how rhetoric [and I would argue writing and research] is always about the intertwinement of bodies, desires, sensations, affects, materiality, and discourse" (Faris, 2020). Indeed, I remain enticed by poetic inquiry in great part because it is an embodied practice.

Of course, a rich body of writing studies scholarship demonstrates efforts to capture the lived, material reality of writers, offering methods for studying and theorizing writing "by engaging the whole material surround of writing" (Micciche, 2014, p. 502; see also Caswell et al., 2016; Micciche, 2017; Vieira, 2019). As these studies affirm, writing (the writing we do and the writing we study) cannot "be plucked from the everyday and treated as a stand-alone activity, one that reaches outcomes, fills preexisting genres, serves as stable evidence of one kind or another" (Micciche, 2014, p. 501). Rather, explains Laura Micciche (2014) "writing is [and writers are] codependent with things, places, people, and all sorts of others … part and parcel of the dwelt-in world" (p. 501). Poetic inquiry offers another way to honor this "economy of connectedness" (Micciche, 2014, p. 499), this relational enmeshment.

Drawing on Eileen Schell's (2012) definition of the material, it is easy to see how poetic inquiry is fitting for researching the contextual, codependent, connectedness of writing lives because it throws into relief writers' experiences of material conditions (conditions of employment, professional status, and respect, for example) and labor of writing; our "material social relations … which include and are influenced by gender, racial, class, disability, and sexual hierachy" (p. 123); the materiality of bodies—writers' bodies, readers' bodies, and researchers' bodies; "the materiality of space[s], place[s], cultural contexts" (p. 123) in which writers live and work; and

the materiality of "lived experiences" (p. 123) more broadly. As I've shown, research poetry crafted from interview transcripts captures in a way traditional data analysis and prose cannot how writing experiences, perspectives, and lives "are muted or controlled by specific material conditions—pregnancy, childrearing, domestic labor, and care of others" (Schell, 2012, p. 128) to name a few. In a similar vein, my experience of poetic inquiry has been an embodied, material one. I feel the work in my body, a connected awareness of myself in relation to others, even as I am aware of my proclivity, as a student of the academy, to hide, dismiss, ignore bodies, of all kinds, to live in my head. Poetic inquiry compels and empowers me to notice and resist normative inclinations like these.

Indeed, the material dimension of poetic inquiry reveals how research norms often privilege rational subjects despite the reality that humans are material, non-rational beings who experience rhetoric and writing as embodied, sensorial practices (Faris, 2020). The materiality of poetic inquiry obliges me to ask what a pedagogical ethic of rhetorical "listening might look like when we attend to materiality, embodiment, sensations, and affect" (Faris, 2020). Toward that end, poetic inquiry resists meaning or knowing from an isolated angle of perception or moment in time and offers instead a "habituated, embodied" and "multisensory" (Faris, 2020) way of being that is materially practiced.

Poetic inquiry, as method, methodology, and rhetorical form, entices researchers to "write passionately and with emotional abandon," as Oleksiak (2020b) puts it, and with what he calls "academic lyricism" or "writing that moves the mind, body, and heart." Drawing on Toni Morrison's distinction between being touched and being moved, Oleksiak (2020b) emphasizes the vital difference between the two, noting "to be touched is to feel the joys and horrors of the world deeply," while "to be moved is to allow what touches us to transform the ways we act in the world." The material, embodied nature of poetic inquiry infuses it with potential for the latter. Of course, as Oleksiak (2020b) points out, moving self and others to be and act differently is a shared responsibility, it happens in relation. Hence the importance of each dimension—rhetorical, pedagogical, ethical, and material—of poetic inquiry as a way of being. In teasing out these four dimensions, I've reinforced the disruptive and transformative value of poetic inquiry for me and for writing researchers hoping to experiment with poetic inquiry as method/ology and guiding ethic. Poetic inquiry offers an ethical, material way of being in our work and a rhetorical, pedagogical strategy for inviting, guiding, and enticing others to try on new ways of being as well.

Poetic Inquiry as Interlistening: Embracing an Ethic of Attunement

Taken together all four dimensions of poetic inquiry constitute a cohesive, principled way of being, or what Lisbeth Lipari (2014) calls "an ethics of attunement" (p. 2) rooted in the practice of "interlistening" (p. 9). Interlistening Lipari explains,

is a resonant, symphonic way of attuning to self and others, "not unlike the vibration of strings" (p. 158).

> Just as musical instruments and other objects can resonate sympathetically in response to vibrations produced by external bodies, interlisteners too can hum in and out of rhythm, harmony, and time in dialogic interaction. Interlistening thus brings … an acknowledgment of the attunement, attentiveness, and alterity always already nested in our process of communication. (Lipari, 2014, p. 159)

The concept of interlistening as part of an ethic of attunement further theorizes the deep listening practices poetic inquiry scaffolds, many of which I've highlighted throughout the book, by emphasizing the intentional, ongoing act of methodological surrender.

Of course, listening can be a mechanism for colonization and exclusion (Clark, 2021; Jackson & DeLaune, 2018; Smilges, 2020). As Rachel C. Jackson points out, ways of listening grounded in Western traditions, even Ratcliffe's rhetorical listening aimed toward "cross-cultural dialogue carries forward western binary logics that reassert meaning making as a process occurring between two parties" (Jackson & DeLaune, 2018, p. 44). Restaino (2019), citing Jessica Benjamin (1988), names a similar, problematic "push-me-pull-you, doer-done to dynamic" (p. 46). Sometimes, ways of listening rooted in Western traditions preclude communicative interaction altogether. As Ehren Helmut Pflugfelder and Shannon Kelly (2022) explain in their chapter on arboreal rhetorics and tree-human relations, listening practices that depend on Euro-Western communication expectations are predicated on understanding and correcting misunderstanding; humans need not listen to those who "communicate differently or otherwise" (p. 69). Alternatively, interlistening emerges from an ethic of attunement, a commitment to what Pflugfelder and Kelly (2022), inspired by Lipari (2014), might call "listening otherwise," listening "from a position of not-knowing," acknowledging "the precarity of [others, including other] species we may never understand" so as to "avoid reduc[ing] or subsum[ing] any other" (p. 69), while simultaneously maintaining a "proximity" (Lipari, 2014, as cited in Pflugfleder & Kelly, 2022, p. 69) that upholds mutual responsibility. Interlistening entails a collaborative, intersubjective act of surrender like the one Restaino (2019) describes, that is rhythmic, recursive, responsive, and rooted in shared vulnerability.

The interlistening enabled by poetic inquiry is akin to what Oleksiak (2020b) calls "queer rhetorical listening" (see also Oleksiak 2020a). Queer listeners, Oleksiak (2020b) explains, embrace and invite "an unending stream of response and transformation. Response and transformation. An unending commitment to be transforming." I understand interlistening through poetic inquiry as a queer praxis in that it does not compel researchers like me to get outside ourselves so that we may know an "other" once and for all; nor does it ask that we inhabit other

perspectives so as to better know ourselves. Rather it acknowledges multiple, mutable meaning(s) always in motion, ever-shifting subjectivities perpetually becoming, transforming.

Faris (2020) emphasizes a kinesthetic aspect to queer listening that reinforces the promise of poetic inquiry as a way of being. "Queer kinesthetic listening" (Faris, 2020) resists the epistemic pull of research; it is nondiscursive (or at least not only discursive), wholistic, fully embodied, intersubjective, and attentive to multiple voices, realities, truths. It is a habituated practice that happens over time rather than in isolated moments. Poetry is an ideal vehicle for enacting a queer kinesthetic praxis. Indeed, I've demonstrated throughout this book how poetic inquiry facilitates "a kinesthetic listening to oneself and others that entails remembering our bodies—and ideally, remembering our bodies differently" (Faris, 2020) in ways that resist dominant logics, such as those governing traditional empirical research, that privilege mind over body, in order to imagine new ways of being and becoming. In this way, interlistening enacted through poetic inquiry becomes a way of being, an ethic of attunement, a radical queer project like the one Waite (2017) describes in *Teaching Queer* that seeks to undo (again and again) certainty and stability as a way to expand what is thinkable, knowable, imaginable, and possible and to research otherwise.

Poetic inquiry offers a mechanism for interlistening in the context of writing research. Both are intentional and intuitive, multimodal and relational. Both "center on the body, the lived materiality of the now, and the eternal circulation of past, present, future, which mingle together in each moment," interweaving various phenomena "from a relational, not a referential or representational, perspective" (Lipari, 2014, p. 160). As McKeon and Honein (2023) point out in their introduction to *Language, Land and Belonging: Poetic Inquiries*, sharing the results of a poetic inquiry is "not only about what is out there, but about revealing the process of how to engage with relationships, places, and ideas on a personal level, and how the mind, body, and spirit process experience" (p. 5). Poet-researchers must be vulnerable, willing to "sho[w] the reader the … struggle, the method, the pain, and the joy that got them there during the research" (McKeon & Honein, 2023, p. 5). In this way, poetic inquiry "lures in the reader, disturbs the traditional experience of reader-receiver/reader-observer, and brings the reader in to engage with the text and experience" (McKeon & Honein, 2023, p. 5). As a mutual act of surrender, "poetic inquiry teaches us as readers [and researchers] to listen" (McKeon & Honein, 2023, p. 5). Poetic inquiry entices those involved in research—researchers, participants, readers—to embrace our shared activity *as* interlistening.

The foundation, the heartbeat, of an ethic of attunement, interlistening through poetic inquiry offers a way to surrender to "interconnection and generosity, impermanence and humility, iteration and patience, and invention and courage" (Lipari, 2014, p. 6). It is not about knowing once and for all; rather "it resists certainty, closure, categorization, and the imperatives of narrative flow … and our insatiable appetite for the familiar" (Lipari, 2014, pp. 102-103). It is a

way of *living into* "such that listening constitutes the very being of [o]ur being" (Lipari, 2014, p.102)—one possible "new (and 'messy') metho[d]" (Law, 2004, p. 2; Rickly, 2012, p. 262) for imagining, being, pursuing an "otherwise" (Tachine & Nicolazzo, 2022b). The notion of interlistening and the ethic of attunement it enacts capture what poetic inquiry has meant for me and the promise I see for what poetic inquiry could mean for writing researchers.

Practicing Attunement through Poetic Inquiry: Challenges and Opportunities

To lean into an ethic of attunement, to use poetic inquiry as a means of interlistening, a researcher might begin by experimenting with one or more of the approaches I've described in this book, perhaps using the driving questions I've highlighted for each approach as a springboard. In my own journey, I've discovered inspiration and guidance as I learned to flex and hone creative habits of mind. Janesick's (2016) *"Stretching" Exercises for Qualitative Researchers* offers prompts and examples, often rooted in embodied movement and meditation, to help researchers tap into our intuitive and creative capacities. I composed the "I am From" poem featured in the introduction using one of Janesick's prompts and I played with her methodological haiku activity as well to grapple with the process of artists-based qualitative research. I relied on Tania Runyan's accessible books *How to Write a Poem* (2015) and *How to Write a Form Poem* (2021) for explanations and examples of form poems along with prompts for practice. In addition to engaging with books about technique and aesthetic inner workings of poetry (Gibson & Falley, 2019; Hirshfield, 1997), I looked for opportunities to enroll in online and in-person workshops and reading groups focused on craft and to lead and participate in arts-based research workshops related to conferences and professional development opportunities in the field.

The final chapter in Faulkner's (2020) slim but mighty volume *Poetic Inquiry: Craft, Method, and Practice* is called "Exercising the Poetry Muscle" and is a treasure trove of "suggestions, questions and challenges" (p. 153) for researchers looking to center creativity in the research process. Exercises focus on the dramatic monologue, ekphrastic poetry, and a range of poetic transcription approaches including found poems, investigative poems, the "surrender and catch" (p. 161) poem, literature-voiced poems, and dialogue poems. Exercises focused on poetic inquiry as data analysis engage with the triptych, the short poem, the long poem, form and function activities, and free form poetry. In her chapter, Faulkner offers scaffolds for creating textual and visual collage and adapting the surrealist game exquisite corpse to generate collaborative poetry. Her heuristics remind me to be patient with myself, to embrace creativity as a practice in every sense of the word, and to lean in to the joy and difficulty of poetic play. They are also easily adaptable for use in the classroom. I've found it fun and useful to incorporate poetic inquiry practices into my teaching as a way to share artistic ways of knowing with

students and explore the affordance of poetic praxis across domains of teaching and research. Lynda Barry's (2014, 2019) work with image has been a delicious compliment to my journey of methodological surrender through poetic inquiry in both my research and teaching.

Poetic inquiry is not only a radical research methodology but a writing methodology as well. Changing how we as researchers make meaning in and through qualitative research means also changing how we write. I appreciate poetic inquiry as a way to embrace Waite's (2019) call to "write queer(er)" (p. 42), to "enact queer subversions of the norms that dictate" how we "compose, report, organize, position, and narrate scholarship and research" (p. 42). Waite (2019) offers a "failing, impossible, contradictory instruction manual" (p. 42) for writing queer(er) that reminds me to surrender what I think I know about academic writing so I can remain open to the possibilities poetic inquiry affords. Those interested in poetic inquiry might find it valuable to explore Waite's invitational list of demands. Here are some of my favorites:

- Don't stay on "on topic." Drift gleefully off. Get lost.
- Imagine your writing outside the bounds of binary understanding: critical and creative, academic and personal, theoretical and practical …
- Talk about your feelings; they are smart. Express and be curious about emotion, "foregrounding emotion as embodied and lived" and "vital for cultivating wonder" (Micciche, 2007, p. 46).
- Show up in your writing as a body, an embodied force in the text, all the while keeping your reader aware that even the body is a contradiction: both an idea constructed and a real material thing that impacts the world ...
- Write in queer voice(s). Contradict yourself. Queer writing "involves deliberately courting paradox" (Rhodes, 2015).
- Don't become an authority on your subject.
- Get disorganized, make a mess.
- Become a "scavenger": develop a "scavenger methdology that uses different methods to collect and produce information" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 13).
- Say something grammatically incomprehensible if and when the thing you are trying to say is something your language, produced also by social construction, does not want you to be able to say.
- Experiment. …
- Don't summarize your argument at the end so we know where we've been and what you've done and accomplished. What you've written should not always be articulable in the tidiness of review. It should be an epic failure of a thing.
- Don't come to conclusions. Come to other things: inquiry, questions, failures, side roads, off-road. (pp. 43-48)

Poetic inquiry offers a playful, adaptable palette for those of us determined to try to compose queerly while recognizing the impossibility of doing so.

As Hanzalik (2021) points out regarding arts-based research practices in general, the possibilities of incorporating poetic inquiry into writing studies research "are endless, evolving, and exciting" and also challenging and intense, as "the process is self-reflexive, dialogic, and questioning, which can create uncertainty but can also ultimately produce a transformative experience" (p. 103). As more writing researchers discover and develop the affordances of poetic inquiry, scholarly, academic, and institutional policies and practices will need to adapt to accommodate and support engagement with artistic research processes and "texts." The burgeoning of arts-based research and poetic inquiry in particular has implications for grant funding apparatuses, tenure and promotion, publication platforms and criteria, and graduate education and degree conferral.

With my own work, I've faced challenges explaining humanistic aspects of poetic inquiry to funding bodies in the social sciences, and explaining social science aspects of my project to funding bodies in the humanities. Hanzalik (2021) urges arts-based writing researchers to capitalize on the interdisciplinary nature of arts-forward methods and highlight for grant award committees the potential for projects to serve a wide range of disciplines, communities, and individuals within and beyond the university. In terms of tenure and promotion, academic researchers might take our cue from analogues to arts-based research such as practice-as-research, practice-based research or what Natalie Loveless (2019) calls "research-creation" (p.2), practices that have long faced skepticism rooted in academic capitalism, and consider how arts-forward methods might resist business as usual (Hanzalik, 2021; Nelson, 2013). How might writing researchers leverage our rhetorical prowess to persuasively articulate the ways poetic inquiry and artistic ways of knowing more broadly "are valuable and can be valuated" (Hanzalik, 2021, p. 98)?

Because publications remain the currency of tenure and promotion systems, publication venues have a role to play in changing the visibility and valuation of arts-forward research. Several writing studies journals and presses are already accommodating, even encouraging, this work. Hanzalik (2021) mentions *Computers & Composition Online* and *Kairos* as promising venues, and I'd add the Sweetland Digital Collaborative. I am grateful to the editors at *Peitho* for welcoming my poetic approach and working with me to build poetic reflection into the apparatus of my article (Tarabochia, 2021) through endnotes and appendices. The open access, online journal *Writers: Craft & Context* of which I am a founding co-editor, is another venue that works to accommodate creative blends of words, images, and sounds and would welcome poetic inquiry projects. As venues evolve and proliferate, writing researchers might take inspiration from online literary arts magazines such as the *AutoEthnographer* (https://theautoethnographer.com).

Changes in the systems and structures that can encourage or shut down arts-forward scholarship are vital if writing researchers are serious about considering how these methods of knowing, being, and doing differently might contribute to ongoing efforts to cultivate an otherwise. As I've argued throughout this book,

poetic inquiry strategies can be valuable for qualitative researchers invested in becoming "misfits" (Restaino, 2019, p. 152), in doing research differently so that we might begin to "weave an otherwise" (Tachine & Nicolazzo, 2022a, p. 5). For me, the following questions were at the heart of my investment in such a project:

- How do I make visible the "human" in human subjects research?
- How can I more fully honor the nuance of participants' lived experience?
- How do I stay accountable to those experiences traditional research tools are most likely to miss or flatten?
- How might I orient to my work not as an objective analyst, but as a "vulnerable observer" (Behar, 1996) immersed in the process?
- How do I acknowledge my entanglement with dominant ideologies and (re)orient to my work in the spirit of knowing, being, and doing differently?
- How can my research directly challenge and begin to transform structures and systems that privilege certain bodyminds (Price, 2015) over others?
- How can I honor and draw forth my work from the rich historical roots of theories of the flesh, forged by women of color, to theorize from physical realities and embodied experience?
- How can I center relationships (with scholars/scholarship, research participants, self, and readers) as both the foundation and goal for my research and writing?

Throughout this book, I hope I've shown, in concrete and generative ways, how poetic inquiry methods facilitate immersive, ongoing engagement with these questions by fostering an ethic of attunement, a way of being—as a researcher, writer, and human—rooted in ongoing practices of interlistening and methodological surrender. My sincerest wish is that writing studies researchers compelled by these questions and commitments will feel inspired to experiment with poetic inquiry practices in their own unique contexts and in so doing continue to establish, expand, imagine, and advocate for the value of artistic ways of making meaning.

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About the Author

Sandra L. Tarabochia is Associate Professor of English at the University of Oklahoma, where she serves as Director of Rhetoric & Writing Studies. Her book *Reframing the Relational: A Pedagogical Ethic for Cross-Curricular Literacy Work* is part of the CCCC/NCTE series Studies in Writing and Rhetoric. She has published scholarship in *Peitho*, *Written Communication*, *Composition Studies*, and *Writing & Pedagogy*. She a founding co-editor (with Aja Y. Martinez and Michele Eodice) of the open-access journal *Writers: Craft & Context*.

Research is the Poetry

In *Research is the Poetry*, Sandra L. Tarabochia demonstrates the promise of poetic inquiry, the arts-based method of creating poems with, as, and in relation to qualitative research data. Informed by studies from a range of disciplines, each chapter introduces a particular poetic research practice and features dynamic examples from Tarabochia's eight-year longitudinal study of faculty writing lives. Thorough discussion of the affordances and challenges of each approach and guiding questions for reflection prompt readers to imagine when, why, and how they might practice poetic inquiry in their own research contexts. Candidly sharing her own process of discovering and learning the method, Tarabochia makes a compelling case for poetic inquiry as a form of methodological surrender, a way of loosening our grip on certainty and what we think we know about scholarly meaning making. *Research is the Poetry* shows writing researchers how to tap into the human dimensions of our work and begin to know, be, and do differently.

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