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Trans/feminist collaborative autoethnographic storytelling of gender-based violence, during the Covid 19 pandemic

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Abstract

The Covid 19 crisis has spotlighted particular insidious social problems, including gender-based violence (GBV), and their relationship with movement and confinement. As well as changing configuration of gender-based violence, the experience of the global pandemic and the immobilities of national lockdowns have created space to imagine gender-based violence – to connect with past experiences in the context of our rethinking of current experiences across multiple spaces. In this article we explicate a transdisciplinary feminist collaborative autoethnographic storytelling of gender-based violence during the Covid 19 pandemic. Based on the ‘trans/feminist methodology’ of Pryse (2000), we seek to contribute knowledge of GBV through the lens of Covid 19 using our own experiential life storytelling. In this article we show the potential of this method in understanding lived experiences over time that are situated in a specific context. Our experiences of GBV, as viewed through the pandemic, are presented as fragments, which then make up a collective narrative that illustrates our shared

experiences of GBV in all its forms, across multiple spaces and throughout our life histories. In this common story, GBV is considered to im/mobilise – to stagnate our range of mobilities to varying degrees across these spaces and times.

Keywords

Gender-based violence, im/mobilities, narrative analysis, collaborative analysis

Summary points

- Trans/feminist collaborative autoethnography is an appropriate methodology for researching sensitive issues including gender-based violence.
- Gender-based violence is produced through embodied, imagined and sensory im/mobilities.
- Seemingly unconnected fragments of autobiographies can together produce a shared story of GBV.

Introduction

The Covid 19 pandemic shone a spotlight on gender-based violence (GBV), which United Nations Women (date unknown) define as

harmful acts directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms. The term is primarily used to underscore the fact that structural, gender-based power differentials place women and girls at risk for multiple forms of violence.

Since the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020, there have been disturbing reports of increases in many forms of GBV, including domestic abuse (Women's Aid, 2020), stalking (Bracewell et al., 2020) and changes in patterns of street harassment (Plan International, 2020). These reports are deeply worrying and are the subject of other articles about our research. This article focuses on *storying* GBV *during the pandemic* and this means that the focus is not on experiences of GBV that have taken place during the pandemic but on stories told from its perspective. The contention here is that the range of 'harmful acts' that are the result of power differentials, including physical, emotional and sexual violence, rape, stalking and harassment, are produced through mobilities and the Covid 19 lockdowns, with their reconfiguring of mobilities, have highlighted this. Thus, we aim to reveal more of the relationship between GBV and immobilities across multiple spaces from our shared viewpoints of the pandemic through storying.

As part of an AHRC funded project on the im/mobilities of GBV during the Covid 19 pandemic, we set out to explore our own autobiographical experiences of gender-based violence in a collaborative autoethnography. The project aimed to contribute to knowledge of gender-based violence (GBV) in this most turbulent period of our lives by focusing in on spaces and movements within and between – on the im/mobilities of GBV in the Covid 19 crisis, where im/mobilities refers to the continuum of movements and their interruptions, both agentic and enforced (Murray and Khan, 2020). Coming together from disparate disciplines, it was important that we found some common methodological ground. We set out to develop a transdisciplinary feminist methodology that reflected our own approaches to storying and its analysis, and particularly to researching an emotive and distressing topic. We were inspired by ‘gender-sensitive methodologies’ that acknowledge the ‘emotional risk in research (Letherby 2020); by the ‘trans/feminist’ methodology of Pryse (2000), which she describes as both trans/porting and trans/formational, ‘rooting’ and ‘shifting’ as it transcends ‘disciplinary prejudices’ and recognises difference; and by the traditions of autoethnography (e.g. Ellis and Bochner 2000), autobiography (e.g. Brennan and Letherby 2015; Letherby 2015, 2017) and collaborative autoethnography (e.g. Chang et al. 2013). The article sets out our methodological approach, presents our collective story and what it contributes to understandings of GBV.

Transdisciplinary feminist and collaborative autoethnography as methodology

Storying our own experiences of a particularly phenomenon is a form of autobiography that is rooted in our experiences as individuals, with the understanding that beginning with the self contributes an understanding of the social (Letherby 2020).

Autoethnographic research draws on life narratives that include the autobiographical. Thus, collaborative autoethnography is a qualitative research method in which researchers come together to share and make sense of a particular phenomenon with reference to their self (Chang et al. 2013). A burgeoning method since the 2000s, it has been used to explore a range of issues from women’s experiences of being child-free (Martinez & Andreatta, 2015) and mothering (Geist-Martin, 2010) to LGBT social activism (Young & McKibban, 2014), and transnational practice with immigrant women (Shapiro and Atallah-Gutiérrez, 2020). Autoethnography values creative and evocative storytelling in academic research where storying problematic life events and trauma can be transformative (Moriarty, 2013). Its potential for feminist work has been highlighted by Metta (2010: 491), who argues that:

[w]omen’s autoethnographic writings provide critical spaces for women’s silenced experiences, voices, stories to be told, mapped and shared, and hence,

contribute to the ways in which we make knowledge about the world and senses of our place in it.

Shapiro and Atallah-Gutiérrez (2020: 174) suggest that collaborative autoethnography allows a connection between ‘autobiographical lived experiences’ and sociopolitical processes’. Although critiqued as lacking in academic rigour, this is often in relation to a perceived lack of reflexivity (Delamont 2009), which can be countered by adopting a purposeful reflexive approach.

A fundamental aspect of our research was the seeking of distinct understandings of GBV in an unprecedented period of history from different disciplinary perspectives. This research adopts a transdisciplinary methodological perspective, drawing on sociology, criminology and creative writing scholarship. It brings together methods of life writing (Moriarty, 2019) and narrative analysis (Holstein and Gubrium 2012) to seek alternative understandings of GBV, picking up on emotional and sensory nuances that other methods might miss. Taking up Pryse’s (2000) call for a trans/feminist methodology that moves across disciplines but also transforms them, we situated ourselves as women who have experienced GBV and have stories to tell. We saw the process of writing is a political act in itself (Negash, 2004) in that “Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing...Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement” (Cixous 1976: 875).

We embarked on our transdisciplinary project with the aim of carefully negotiating, working together as a collective, which resulted in an agreed position of collaborative reflexive storying. The emphasis was on the particular conditions of our experiences (Shuman, 2012) so that we can produce insights on GBV from the perspective of the pandemic. We set out to place ourselves into the text and into the project of storying, engaging in a ‘dialectic of communication’ involving ‘intimate conversation’ (Schweickart, 1986: 52) in a way that ‘honours multiple voices and processes and opens up rather than shuts down’ (Loots 2016, 389). Our feminist methodology is about analysing the experiences of women in a way that challenges dominant intellectual traditions. This also means being particularly mindful of ethical issues. Indeed, one of the central ethical concerns raised by Delamont (2009) is that in autoethnographic research it is often difficult to protect the people who are close to the researcher as they will play a role in the researcher’s autobiographical story. For us, stories are central to gaining an understanding of GBV. They offer a way of making sense of situations that are unparalleled. As Negash (2004: 188) suggests, stories take ‘stock of the discontinuities of the social life process that a “science” of human life or generalizations about human behavior [sic] cannot accommodate’. We experienced, sensed and felt

together through writing – first autobiographically and then reflecting on and analysing our stories together – as a collaborative autoethnography.

Creating fragments as a collective story

Having agreed the framing of our collaborative autoethnography, we started off the process of storying our own experience. This was led by one of the team who is an expert in life writing and organised a writing workshop for the group. Prior to an online storying workshop, we each spent some time apart producing our own stories of gender-based violence, which we brought to the workshop, held in March 2021. Due to Covid 19 restrictions in the UK at the time, the workshop was held on Microsoft Teams. We had few instructions or ‘rules’ but a safety warning was issued at the start of the workshop to let people know that none of the workshop exercises had been designed to force people to share experiences that they might not feel comfortable disclosing. Instead the emphasis was on storying – real and imagined – and no-one had to read their work aloud or feel obliged to take part in any exercise unless they wanted to. As part of this project, the workshop facilitator co-devised a model of best practice when facilitating workshops with people who have experienced GBV (Parks et al. 2022) and these principles were applied to the session with the research team.

We discussed the ethical issues beforehand including the sensitivities of the subject of GBV and sharing our stories with each other as well as the importance of protecting others’ identities. Through this process we collectively became ‘emotional (auto) ethnographers’ (Lumsden 2009), actively engaging with our gendered experiences. The methodological approach became an instrument for reflexivity, as we not only collectively shared stories but also reflected on the emotive, triggering and often empowering and remedial impact of doing so. Our shared experience of this reflects existing feminist work that considers auto-autoethnography as therapeutic (McMillan & Eaton Ramirez 2016). The process also acted as a form of ‘emotional recall’, as our collective storytelling during the pandemic led us to access affective past memories of GBV (Fox 2020) and consider how they implicated and intertwined the present. Stories are imaginings of social experience that can be illogical and fragmented., particularly when recalling traumatic events (Atkinson, 2018).

We, similarly, planned to move through and between each other’s stories as ‘nomadic subjects’ (Radway, 1988: 26) as part of our reflexive project. We were at the same time aware of our positionalities as researchers working together. The emotional work of the research meant that we could not explore these. But our story is particular to us and our positionalities and at the same time relevant beyond our demographic. We agreed that we were interested less in *who did what to whom* and more on what came to mind in the

moment. We also checked in with each other throughout the process, as this work is unsettling in different ways and at different times. It was important to maintain an ethic of care and we gave each other the option to opt out of the autoethnography at any time. We each completed a consent form that detailed these ethical details.

It became clear in the workshop that we all had multiple stories to tell and that we were drawing from different life-stages – the space of the pandemic (and of the research) had opened up possibilities for reflecting back on our lives that we had not expected. In many ways this was similar to the lived feminine practice of ‘memory-work’ developed by Frida Haug and colleagues (1987) that was devised in part to research sensitive topics, but here the emphasis was on the stories rather than the memories. In reducing the potential stress of sharing sensitive experiences, particularly in online meetings, we agreed that the stories could be autobiographical fictions. Barthes (1982) suggested that the lines between autobiography and fiction were muted and blurring, and this opens up a potential space for autobiographical fictions that draw on lived events, but combines these with literary and artistic techniques that turn the known into the unknown and people we may struggle to write about—ethically, legally, or because we don’t want to give them a voice or platform—into imagined characters. We identify the space that Barthes speaks to as being where autoethnography resides. In embracing autobiographical fiction, we contain our memories and create new narratives for our lives. Narratives we can live with.

During the workshop we identified that our accounts, life writing and autobiographical fiction, appeared as ‘fragments’. The ways we conceptualised the notion of fragment can be illustrated with reference to French writer Georges Perec who wrote an autobiographical work called *Je me souviens* (1978) (reworked/adapted as *Memories* (1986) by Gilbert Adair), which consists of a list of 480 memories, each beginning with the words Je me souviens/I remember. Perec’s memories focused on the seemingly small or trivial, but the story remains compelling and aesthetically absorbing because of the evocative detail. Perec’s father was killed at the start of WW2 and his mother later died in Auschwitz, but by holding onto the seemingly small details and using them to develop a three-dimensional account of his family’s lives before this tragedy, the unimportant suddenly seem huge and meaningful. This method of writing in fragments, depicting one memory at a time is also evident in *That Reminds Me* by Derek Owusu which explores a “struggle for self-expression, the presentation of a nascent yet powerful self-loathing, a sense of the self being shaped by adversity” (Donkor, 2019) where the splintered recollections of the protagonist, K, leave the reader with a vivid sense of his experiences growing up and how they have shaped who he is. Both of these stories – Owusu’s and Perec’s – offer the narrators a way of navigating deep-seated issues that are evocative and intimate but do not simply report details or offer up a

linear narrative in a conventional form. Thus, writing in fragments gives the author power over what is shared and what is held back and this became an important aspect of our project. It fits well with our autoethnographic approach to autobiographical writing and research in displaying multiple layers of consciousness (Ellis and Bochner 2000) and autoethnography as bricolage (Denzin and Lincoln 2005), where representation is derived from multiple fragments.

After the workshop we each wrote new fragments of stories and we shared these with each other as they were produced, so that the collection of fragments grew over time. Throughout this process we were reflexive, sitting with each other's storied fragments and reconsidering our own in relation to them through an iterative process. The similarities between them became clear and we felt strongly that, in order to remain in line with our agreed framework of collaborative feminist autoethnography, our storied fragments should not be separated for the process of analysis. We suggest that writing in this way enabled us to navigate ethical dilemmas that writing about intimate others can evoke. No one story is privileged, instead the five narratives weave and intermingle to produce a multi-layered text that tells *our* story. Frank (2012, 38) argues that 'people's stories report their reality as they need to tell it, as well as reporting what they believe their listeners are prepared to hear'. This argument views stories as representations of the truth and accordingly, our method of co-production is not concerned with truth or facts, which are not always helpful in critical understanding. Instead, we have identified a method for storying autobiographical experiences of GBV as a potential way of retelling our stories whilst navigating the legal, ethical and moral dilemmas sometimes associated with autobiographical writing in research (Lincoln, 2009) that has helped to make these stories more pleasurable to write and perhaps also to read. Thus, we combined our fragments into one narrative where it is not explicit who is speaking or which author wrote which fragment. We present an agreed selection below, formed into one story that may appear disjointed and illogical, but it is important for us that they are kept together to maintain the integrity of the exercise as explained above. They are not only excerpts, but vital parts of a whole story that is shared by all of the researchers. The story is intentionally not chronological; the lifecourse is not linear but we move back and forth through experiences and rememberings and our story importantly evokes this. It is also necessarily unsettling.

I keep meaning to walk alone during lockdown. Not to the shops or allotment, but really walk, lose myself to my thoughts, to the haze of the bluebells, songs of the blackbirds or the squelch of my shoes in the mud. But I know that buried deep down, far back, there is a fear that stops me. [1]

When I was 7, and walking home from school (alone), an old man starting walking with me, just a few minutes from my house. I didn't want him there, but I didn't know how to tell him not to be. We arrived at my house, and my mum ran out from the front door and down the path, grabbing me. She saw us both at the front window and was worried. She said she "didn't know who the hell he was". [2]

When I was 25 I was sat on a train in a quiet carriage. A man, a similar age, came and sat opposite me, and spread out his legs (like all men do) so I was trapped. He starting talking to me. I pointed out that his stance was intimidating, that he was trapping me in. He said he had no idea, and moved his legs. Then he asked me out for a drink (I said no thank you).[3]

The man was staring at me – really staring. I was unnerved and glad when my train pulled in and I was safely on board. But as the train emptied on its many stops, I felt the inevitable fear creep in, more exposed as each person alighted. When it finally came to my stop I was astonished when I looked back along the platform of the isolated station and saw the same man getting off my train - still staring. I ran...I still feel uneasy - 25 years later - whenever I pass that station on the outskirts of London. [4]

When I was 13, I used to catch a regular bus to and from school. My best friend used to catch it with me at the end of the school day, but she'd stay on an extra few stops as she lived in the next village from me. We used to say hello to the bus driver. One day, he wasn't driving the bus home, but when she got off her stop, he was waiting for her in his car at her stop. She asked him what he was doing there, and he told her "I'm waiting for you". She told me about it the next day. Neither of us knew what we could do about it, so we didn't do anything. [5]

One day, when I was maybe eleven or twelve, I was sitting on the bonnet of my dad's green Ford Granada that was parked in our driveway and that changed, facing outwards and watching people walk by – imagining where they were going and where they had come from - my legs hanging over the edge of the car, a little apart. A couple of older boys walked by. I knew one of them as he lived around the corner, but the other was a stranger. They looked at me from across the road, and my neighbour whispered something to the other boy. They laughed. Then the boy I didn't know shouted across the road: 'What are you, naïve? Shut your legs'. [6]

At the same workplace, at a similar time, I was in the reception area, signing a form, when my (male) boss came up behind me and grabbed my waist. I spun around and said, very loudly, "I can't believe that you just did that!". He started back sheepishly and walked off. I looked over at the witnesses, a row of 3 women who worked in admin. "I can't believe he just did that" I said again, this time to them. They said nothing. Just shrugged. [7]

A woman was killed. Murdered. At the hands of a man. We sat in the kitchen, so far from the epicentre of the anger and sadness, but we felt it all the same. We sat in silence for a minute. Tears trickled down Beth's cheeks. And Charlie's. Ellie stared straight into the flame. Jay sat with his head bowed down. Lucie's wide eyes looked around. I felt hot rage in the pit of my stomach. In my throat and behind my eyes. I felt lucky. To be alive. When we turned the lights back on, we shared our stories and let the anger roll off our tongues and jump around the room like water droplets on a hot stove. We shared our stories, our anger, our sadness and despair, as we ate the rest of the patatas bravas. [8]

When I was fifteen or so, I was assaulted on a bus. A man with auburn hair and an auburn beard shoved his hand up my school skirt. He got off the bus once I'd pulled away and told him to keep his hands to himself. I was still shaking when I got home. [9]

Nearly every day, on my walk to school with my friends, we had to pass a man who flashed at us from his front room. [10]

The older brother offered to drive me home at the end of the day. I tried to decline but he insisted, saying it was no trouble and I must be tired having been on my feet all day. As we drove along in his Jaguar, he asked me questions that I didn't want to be asked and looked at me in a way that I didn't want to be looked at. Despite his persistence, I turned down his offer of a drink. I felt lucky when he dropped me off. [11]

It's already gone 11pm when we finally start to close down, someone puts on the Reservoir Dogs soundtrack and turns it up loud. Compared to my mates who work in Tesco and McDonalds, this is heaven. Over the music, I don't hear my boss creep up behind me, he bends me over the counter and pretends to have sex with me while the other three clap and cheer. When it's over, I wipe over my own fingerprints, making sure the glass is gleaming so I can see my face sighing gently, knowing I will be back here in less than ten hours for another busy day. [12]

I haven't been on a bus or a train since the Covid 19 crisis began and, in many ways, I'm pleased that I have a reason not to. I have always felt safest in my car and now I am less guilty for using it so often. The lockdown meant that I haven't had to dread the bus journey home during nights out with friends - or imagine the walk from the bus stop to my door. I'm glad that my mouth is covered so that I don't have to be told to smile – although to be fair I haven't had that for a few years. [13]

There are fields on one side, back gardens of houses on the other. I wasn't sure how far it was to the turning. There was no one around. I kept going and the fields and houses gave way to steep embankments on both sides and I wondered what would happen if something happened and I was down there with no one to see and no mobile phone. I started walking faster and my footsteps echoed under the bridge and I didn't know if the turning was before or after the bridge and I kept walking faster and faster and looking behind me and looking behind me and walking faster and faster... [14]

I got off the bus on Camberwell New Road and decided to walk under the railway bridge, the quickest way to the red brick streets. I was carrying a handbag. There was this guy, sitting in a parked car in a row of parked cars under the railway bridge, where crisp packets and cigarette butts gathered in graffitied dark edges. I walked a little faster, but not too fast. I wrapped my handbag handles around my wrist after it was nearly whipped away by two teenagers rushing behind and past me a few days earlier. I told myself to keep going, to look straight ahead of me. [15]

Now, when I think of it, I imagine there must have been a sound, a train chundering along the bridge, or something. What I mean is, I didn't hear his footsteps. [16]

I felt what was happening first. A tugging on my arm, on my bag. A pulling in my shoulder. Rough. Urgent. I turned and looked him straight in his orange-flecked, bloodshot eyes. I took in his greasy dark blonde hair and pockmarked face. I tried to untangle my hand from my bag as urgently as he was pulling on it. We didn't speak. Neither of us spoke. There was no one else to hear. [17]

I remember Pulp's Common People playing over the shop speakers, the hum of customers choosing one or two scoops, sprinkles or sauce. This is a treat, there is joy here. I am the only woman in the small space behind the counter, my

imposed uniform of short black skirt and see-through blouse is already smeared with chocolate, caramel, raspberry sauce, and we are only halfway through the 12-hour shift. One of the men pushes past me, apologising for sliding his groin into me in the chaos. The customer I'm serving berates him light-heartedly and I tell them it happens all the time. He winks and says, 'I bet you love it!', gives me a large tip. [18]

Collaborative and reflexive narrative analysis

Following the workshop and having now produced a corpus of fragments, not all of which is represented above, we agreed to each analyse the storied data separately and in different ways, before coming together for a second workshop, where we shared our analytic ideas and responses to them. We moved the ideas and data between us and discussed and rethought our understandings, finally coming to a shared agreement of the themes presented below. Narrative approaches are concerned with how people make sense of their own experiences and value stories as a method of effectively communicating information (Riessman, 2008). Determining a collaborative approach to analyse the stories, given our different disciplinary roots, was always going to be awkward. However, we shared an understanding of the importance of narrative 'as a distinctive form of discourse that shapes meaning through the concerted ordering of story material' (Holstein and Gubrium, 2012: 6).

Our stories say more than happenings but convey emotions, values and interpretations and this mapped our journey to a narrative analysis that encapsulated our varying analytical and/or critical practices. We settled on Holstein and Gubrium's (2012) synthesis of narrative analysis into a series of component parts that are sometimes in conflict and sometimes complementary. These component parts include a thematic approach to making sense of narrativized lived experience (for example, Riessman, 2008) alongside an understanding of narrative practice. The themes make sense of the storied fragments by drawing out common patterns across them. Emphasising narrative practice, concerned with the storying itself rather than how 'facts' are unearthed, draws out the contextual features and meanings that become lost when the story is dissected. Holstein and Gubrium's (2012) third component focuses in on the situatedness of storying and the 'reflexive interplay between the whats and the hows of storytelling', recognising the transformative elements that are foundational in Pryse's (2000) trans/feminist methodology. Moving between these varying approaches, as Holstein and Gubrium's (2012) suggest, produces a collaborative and reflexive analysis that is uncomfortable in part, but one that allows researchers from different disciplinary

traditions to ‘root’ and ‘shift’ (Pryse 2000) so that we were able to transcend our differences.

The first stage in this process was the thematic analysis, which represented a space of familiarity and relative comfort for the social scientists in the team. We adopted an iterative and reflexive process, rather than one based on the more rigid structures of coding and theme creation. A number of themes were produced in this to-ing and fro-ing analysis. First, the *embodied mobilisations and immobilisations* – the range of movements that we make with our bodies. Sometimes, these are a physical response to the stories of others - for example, we write about bowed heads, trickling tears and hot rage [8]. At other times, we write about our physical responses to our own experiences of GBV (for example, the untangling of the hand from the bag [17], the still shaking when I got home [9]). Sometimes the omnipresence of GBV and the need to attend to its dangers makes us deliberately appear to be immobile (‘stared straight’ [10], ‘head bowed’ [8], ‘said nothing’ [7]) but there is a cacophony of mobilities that operate below the bodily surface, often ‘buried deep down’ [1] purposively hidden from view – for example, ‘I felt the...fear creep in’ [3], ‘sighing gently’ [12]. Such physical and physiological movements, both overt and covert, speaks to the conceptualisation of immobility as a panorama of movement rather than stasis, the relationality of disempowerment and resistance to it – as im/mobility (Murray and Khan 2020).

Second is the *encroachments of embodied space* that precipitates the invasion of our bodies. Our stories are peppered with instances of violent incursion on our bodies. This is both *physical*: the tugging at our arms [17], the shoving of hands and eyes up skirts [9], the grabbing of waists [7] and ‘trapping me in’ [3]; and also *non-physical*: the men staring and still staring [4], the unwanted looks [6], the laughing [6] and the waiting [5]. Attempts to protect others from harm can also involve such encroachment, such as when the mother ran out ‘grabbing’ [2] her daughter as she returned home with a strange man. Sometimes the environment itself plays a role in feelings of encroachment – for example, the ‘heavy’ air that acted as an additional oppressor as it added to feelings of physical vulnerability [4].

Third, our stories tell of the common sensations of heat, uneasiness, anger, fear, pain and luck, which are felt and unfelt, mobilised and immobilised: the *immobilisations of the sensorium*. We share these feelings, and they move with us and manifest in different ways in different spaces. They sometimes immobilise to the point of motionlessness, for example, ‘a fear that stops me’ [1], but they are more often stifling movement – introducing friction rather than stopping it completely. For example, ‘I didn’t want him there, but I didn’t know how to tell him not to be’ [2].

Fourth is the *imagined im/mobilities* – the mental mapping of the escape routes and of safe spaces – spending an evening out having to 'imagine the walk from the bus stop to my door [16]. In our stories we imagine being 'safely on board' [4], even when we might not be safe onboard, as well as the mundane 'imagining where they were going and where they had come from' [6]. We also think about possible scenarios as we move through different spaces: 'I wondered what would happen if something happened and I was down there with no one to see and no mobile phone. I started walking faster' [14]. Other people's imagined harms caused by GBV also creep into view, such as the mothers who was 'worried' [2] for her young daughter. The absence of others is often experienced as a form of violence. We imagine places of people, Jacob's (1961) 'eyes on the street' as safer than solitary spaces in which we are alone, such as on empty train carriages and cars: Stark's concept of 'safety zones' (2009, 216) in the context of domestic abuse has resonance here. As Stark explains, 'women forge safety zones to secure moments of autonomy, rehearse survival or escape strategies, plan resistance, regain a momentary sense of control or self-worth, and recover pieces of their lost voice or subjectivity'. The transformation of 'safety zones', real or imagined, is an important outcome of the Covid-19 pandemic and its associated lockdowns.

Following Holstein and Gubrium (2012), the next stage was to interlink the themes with the practices of storying, with the understanding that relating them to these practices enriches their meanings. We found that many of the same physical responses that were described in the telling were re-experienced by each of us during the listening – the bowed heads, the trickling tears, the hot rage. The re-experiencing of the trauma of gender-based violence was evident during this process of collaborative reflexive storying and it is something that other researchers of GBV have documented (see Williamson et al, 2020). Furthermore, the situatedness of the telling of these stories in the current Covid 19 pandemic is significant. The stories are told from a relational position in which we are comparing our past experiences with those of the present: 'The lockdown meant... [16]. The narratives illuminate particular perceptions of the different ways in which we move through space, of our *embodied immobilisations*. There are a range of movements and pauses that are described in a way that emphasises the poignancy of experiences.

We are doing things differently and reflecting in various ways on what this means in relation to our GBV experiences. But the stories are imbued more deeply with the pandemic, as is their telling – the situatedness of storying, in Holstein and Gubrium's words. They are being told within the constraints of this particular time. We could not meet up face-to-face to talk through our experiences and share our stories and this brings its own immobilisations. Instead, we met together online, each in our own homes, often with young children and other family members in the same setting. Our

stories are a product of this context. We were writing and analysing at a particular moment during the pandemic. It was the early Spring of 2021, at the time of the murder of Sarah Everard and the women's vigils that followed the police handling of the case. One of our stories is based on these events. Our *sensoria, in response to these events are immobilised* as we feel 'hot rage in the pits of [our] stomachs...but are at the same time paralysed as [we] wondered what I could do about it (though [we] knew there [is] nothing) [8].

Specific details are important in our accounts of GBV and play significant roles in both the experience and its re-telling. Too often in accounts of gender-based violence, such apparent minutiae are excluded. Yet, as these stories testify, these environmental details are part of the rich tapestry through which GBV is both experienced and understood. But these details are also part of sensory remembering – 'the legs hanging over the edge of the car' is based on the feel of the warm metal of the car. Our sensory memories are immobilised through time. We may not have had the opportunity to tell them, or they may have been told in a different way at a different time and in a different context. There are many storied fragments, and it may be that we feel too burdened with memories to tell them. The Covid 19 pandemic, as the most immobilising event in our lifetimes, all of its deep juncture has presented the opportunity to pause and remember – as women, as feminists and as academics aiming to make sense of our own and each others' experienced gender-based violence.

Our stories are characterised by a particular mutuality of experience – whether with those that invade our mobile bodies and minds to our friends and families who become entwined in our stories. We use different discursive practices to engage and disengage in order to protect ourselves from becoming overwhelmed by our experiences, for example, writing with a more passive voice and, as discussed earlier, by choosing to write in fragments. There is also the choosing of content so that we can imagine ourselves elsewhere: either escaping from a particular GBV experience, or imagining a different outcome. They are importantly fragments of our lives and we have chosen them carefully. There is much more to tell, from all of us, but some stories were too difficult for us to tell.

Conclusion

This article set out to both develop a shared transdisciplinary and feminist methodology that allows us to work at the rich seams of our disciplines and to produce knowledge on gender-based violence from our own stories at this particular moment in history. Our trans/feminist methodology was both collaborative and reflexive - illuminating GBV

from the perspective of the Covid 19 pandemic. It opened up possibilities to work across disciplines through an iterative, negotiated transdisciplinary process that was sympathetic to both to disciplinary traditions and styles of research as well as to the vulnerabilities of autobiographical storytelling of sensitive and emotional topics. It is hoped that through methodological approaches like this, the value of storytelling will be recognised as a complementary mode of evidence alongside other qualitative research and statistics. This is necessary in order to ensure certain aspects of GBV do not go unnoticed. We suggest too, that our trans/feminist collaborative autoethnographic storytelling could be replicated in other areas to produce new insights to in other areas of research around GBV.

We aimed to show that by using this methodological approach it is possible to transform knowledge by offering original insights that contribute to understandings of GBV in the current Covid 19 crisis, particularly those relating to the immobilities of GBV. This is not only in relation to experiences during the crisis, but to the cultural conditions of the pandemic, which have both opened up and closed down, mobilised and immobilised. We found that GBV is associated with: embodied mobilisations and immobilisations; encroachments of embodied space; immobilisations of the sensorium; and imagined immobilities. But what is key to our findings is the collective story, a product of our methodological strategy, which illustrates the ways in which gender-based violence is experienced across a range of spaces and throughout our life histories, including in early childhood, and which shape our sensory relations with different spaces. They form a collective story that represents collective gendered experiences. Our story is produced collaboratively and reflexively from a feminist perspective. As Pryse (2000: 118) suggests, those who ‘engage in the struggle with interdisciplinary methodologies will also become ‘versed’ in the ability to engage in dialogue across differences’. In doing so we contribute to debates on GBV – on its pervasiveness through space and time so that it immobilises us as a society. By focusing in on these im/mobilities and zooming out to see GBV in its multiple forms and in its varied spaces, we can gain a fuller understanding that will help address it. As important as what is told in our stories, is what remains untold. When we engage with stories, we have to remember to concern ourselves with those things that are included and also, with those that are not.

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