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'Yeah, embrace your anger. Fuck them.': using feminist collaborative autoethnography and an ethics of care to (re)imagine our position as disabled women in academic spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond

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abstract

In this article, we argue that a *Slow Feminism*, which evolves through the slow but consistent support of other women that is embedded in care, compassion and constructive challenge against patriarchal expectations, is essential for the future of feminist praxis within higher education. This work emerged from our coming together to reflect-on-action on our experiences as disabled, women, postgraduate researchers in different disciplines during the COVID-19 pandemic. Feeling 'othered' by and invisible to hierarchal structures, we sought to understand our individual challenges through a collective lens. Relational ethics and a praxis of care in line with feminist epistemology underpinned our systematic 'feminist collaborative autoethnography', whereby we critically engaged with individual reflections and together in online meetings to interpret shared social, emotional and structural challenges. In this article, we draw on our experiences sharing this data through poetry, during the stage of our collaborative project in which we utilised 'poems' to identify the challenges of being a disabled woman navigating higher education, and the resistance we employed individually, and collectively, in support of one another. Through this process, we challenged the neoliberal, patriarchal and oppressive systems that we are forced to engage with daily and our own complicity in them. Using our individual, collective and overlapping voices, whereby we recognise the tensions and supportive narratives created by and within our research conversations, we identify that feminist activism and feminist futures are not solely a response to extreme events.

keywords

slow feminism; Listening Guide; collaborative autoethnography; ethics of care; COVID-19; collaboration

introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic engendered a further opportunity to subjugate already minoritised and oppressed groups, as the global response often prioritised the protection of institutions and economies over the protection of people and communities (Viswanath and Mullins, 2021; Goodley *et al.*, 2023). In 2020, the competition between disabled[1] peoples' access needs and the public health measures taken against the virus complicated daily life and was a source of significant stress for many of us (Cochran, 2020; Ɛskytė *et al.*, 2020; Lund *et al.*, 2020). This was compounded for us as a research collective, with our disabled bodies associated with weakness, lack of value and helplessness, which does not align to the hegemonic competitiveness associated with higher education (Doonan, 2021).

The pandemic was a disruptive and undermining force in our personal and professional lives. We saw our research projects significantly slow down or ultimately stop. We each struggled in different ways with the impacts of both the pandemic and the responses taken by authorities in an attempt to halt its progress. The change this required in everyday routines was experienced as a seismic disturbance, particularly among neurodivergent people,[2] including for our research group (Felepchuk, 2021; Hannam-Swain and Bailey, 2021).

Disabled students faced unique challenges because of both COVID-19 and the specific non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) selected by the UK government and academic organisations. In May 2020, a report by the National Association of Disability Practitioners highlighted the impact of the changes to academic life on a diverse range of disabled student groups (Wilson, 2020). For instance, one Deaf student was left socially isolated as a result of the lack of captioning available on some university calls (*ibid.*, p. 7), which was also reflected in our own experiences; members of our research group with auditory processing challenges found the visual and auditory information through recordings and online calls disruptive. Aspects of pandemic student life that were a mere inconvenience for some students could have a significant impact on the well-being of others. As remarked by student and activist Syreeta Nolan (2020), 'being disabled is a part of who I am, not just a list of conditions on my medical chart'.

As a research group we are all disabled women, and at the creation of our research group all three of us were students. One of our research group members has since completed her doctorate, and the others are writing up their theses. Two of us are in permanent academic posts, and one is on a casualised teaching contract; thus, we have experienced 'sides' of disability that are often ignored or missed by higher education, as 'the academy has yet to understand that disability and impairment can be found on both sides of the desks' (Hansen, 2022, p. 61). To validate our difficult circumstances, and support one another through the pandemic, we developed and utilised a methodological process we term 'feminist collaborative autoethnography' (FCAƐ). Through this process, we aimed to collectively unpack and understand our experiences of adversity; share our challenges and provide a space for catharsis; and

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[1] We use the social model of disability in recognising that our environments and contexts are disabling, rather than the medical model of disability which identifies us and/or our bodies as impaired.

[2] Identity-first language complements the neurodiversity model, whereby different neurotypes (autism, ADHD etc.) are an example of diversity rather than disorder; thus, we view it as a way of being in the world, rather than a deficit.

identify and promote our adaptive strategies (Rutter *et al.*, 2021). We experienced tensions between our everyday lived experiences and the lack of institutional understanding of the challenges we faced. This meant that our engagement with our FCAE not only provided us with a space to express our shared and overlapping experiences as disabled women in the pandemic but also became a vehicle to explore our multiple intersecting identities in the context of an academic landscape altered by the pandemic.

This article represents our FCAE reflections one year on from the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, as we began to acclimatise and heal from the loss of our initial expectations and hopes for our postgraduate research journey. We reflect upon our feminist praxis, underpinned by a 'relational ethics using a praxis of care' (*ibid.*), in sustaining an ethically sound and caring approach to our collaborative research through what we term *Slow Feminism*. We utilise this Slow Feminism to reclaim difficult experiences as disabled women in academia and to recognise the entanglements of our stories, particularly in relation to shared and differing experiences of being disabled in the academy. In line with our existing feminist epistemological approach (*ibid.*) we wanted to truly capture the individual, complementary and overlapping voices that co-constitute the narratives created by our research conversations. Slow feminism allows us to be attentive to 'data fragments [which] would sometimes seem to glow' (Maclure, 2013, p. 661). For Maggie Maclure (*ibid.*), the 'glow' of data 'seems to invoke something abstract or intangible that exceeds propositional meaning, but also has a decidedly embodied aspect', which is rather akin to the lived experience of disability. We have previously engaged in this approach through developing the FCAE (Rutter *et al.*, 2021) and subsequent analyses utilising the Listening Guide (LG) (Gilligan *et al.*, 2006, 2015; Woodcock, 2016; Gilligan and Eddy, 2017; Yeo *et al.*, 2023). In this article, we draw together our learning from this ongoing collaborative research process to evidence the challenges of being a disabled woman navigating higher education, and the resistance we employed individually and collectively to support one another through these challenges.

context and positionality

MARCUS. I am a white working-class Welsh woman living in the North of England. My pronouns are usually she/her but I feel just as comfortable being referred to as they/them. I identify as queer. I began the pandemic as a part-time teacher, full-time PhD student and mother. I was busy, juggling many plates successfully and on a positive trajectory within my research. The pandemic brought this to a juddering halt. Suddenly, I was a key worker, a carer, a failing student. I had not accepted my identity as a disabled person, internalised ableism perpetuating harmful views that prior diagnoses of PTSD, anxiety and depression did not make me disabled 'enough'. These conditions, often ignored by me, quickly became the pressing, driving forces of my existence. At a personal point of crisis, the FCAE process catalysed urgent and crucial self-reflection, which in turn began the journey towards an ADHD diagnosis at the age of 41. I 'end' the pandemic as a full-time lecturer, part-time PhD student, mother and neurodivergent and disabled person.

EMMA. I am a working-class woman from a town in Northeast England. Being diagnosed as autistic at the age of 22 was a transformative experience in my self-understanding. No longer were the challenges that I faced seemingly routine tasks or my ability to hyperfocus on a task for hours odd. With my diagnosis, I felt I gained not only a greater understanding of myself but a new means of engaging with a community of those like me. The FCAE process helped me to understand how past experiences of ableism had shaped my identity as a disabled woman. The process allowed me to break free of the narratives that those experiences had created and to build a positive identity based on resilience and strength, rather than pain. I have since, during the writing of this article, been diagnosed with ADHD.

NIKKI. I am a working-class woman from nowhere, having spent much of my childhood as a 'pad brat'. I began my PhD comfortable and confident in sharing my various health diagnoses, but my engagement in the FCAE has resulted in a shift. I now feel that self-identification is equally as valid as diagnosis, and so I will say that I am neurodivergent and chronically ill in support of those who are unable to gain a diagnosis due to structural barriers. I experience chronic fatigue, and pain, and this often restricts my activity. I am also a lone parent to a neurodivergent child who required support to access remote schooling throughout the COVID-19 UK lockdowns. My wider family opted to shield and 'bubble' together, which left me to parent, teach and complete my PhD feeling very much alone, were it not for my PhD co-researchers and the feminist collaborative autoethnographers. They were my catharsis. They were my care.

We began our FCAE as professional acquaintances, but our experiences became entangled and entwined and as such, our intimacy and friendship grew (Tillmann-Healy, 2003; Castrodale and Zingaro, 2015). We found that our ontological approach to learning and research was not as quick or intensive as we had initially envisaged. Through the pandemic, we engaged in a slower ontology, one which we had previously rejected due to the relentless pace of academic production expectations (Apple, 2005).

slowing ontologically

The pandemic caused a stoppage of standard models of working. The enforced slowing of lifestyles necessitated by pandemic restrictions in many countries did not always translate to higher education, and thus many PhD students experienced a disconnect between the pandemic's impact on their lives and the escalating and relentless pace of academia (Apple, 2005). This proved unsettling for the authors as PhD students whose fieldwork was heavily impacted during this time and who had no inclination of when (or if) our projects could continue unimpeded.

Marcus Banks (2014) highlights the lack of opportunity for researchers to mull over or revisit ideas or data in the confines of neoliberal academic production goals; this was compounded by the pandemic, as we were unable to proceed with our doctoral research but were asked by our funders to record the impact of the pandemic on our PhDs. As such, we began to meet and collectively document our experiences in our initial FCAE project (Rutter *et al.*, 2021). As the pandemic progressed, we found ourselves relying more on our FCAE sessions to help us to process our experiences via this slowing down, reflecting and recapping. Thus, unwittingly at first, we found ourselves engaging in Slow scholarship (Martell, 2014; Mountz *et al.*, 2015; Shefer and Bozalek, 2022). The word 'Slow' is capitalised to discern it from the universal meaning of slow, as linked with the passing of time. Instead, it stresses that Slow scholarship can be time intensive, as time is given to close engagement with reading and writing (as explained by Jasmin B. Ulmer's [2017] notion of 'Slow Ontology'). Its key function is 'addressing issues of governance and well-being through providing opportunities for more dialogue and spaciousness' (O'Neill, 2014). By embracing Slow scholarship, researchers actively subvert neoliberal power dynamics and take control of the direction of their research, taking time to question thoughtfully and to reimagine research outcomes and practices. As Tamara Shefer and Vivienne Bozalek explain:

> Slow scholarship is one of the identified ways in academia that has actively shown resistance to neoliberal markets ... through engaging in alternative and ethical ways of being/becoming, doing and knowing, emphasising qualities such as discernment, depth, pleasure, longing, yearning, desire, curiosity, maintaining meaningful connections with others. (Shefer and Bozalek, 2022, p. 251)

In this sense, our feminist praxis in the form of friendship and collaboration might be seen as constituting Slow scholarship. Furthermore, our research also encompasses what Charlie Yi Zhang (2018) categorises as 'Slow activism', which embodies:

> [D]aily practices that seem trivial and insignificant on the surface level and would not yield any consequences immediately ... [but] are fundamentally seminal and germinal in that ... [they play] a crucial role in modulating and orienting potentialities and tendencies that might explode into transformative upheavals. (*ibid.*, p. 205)

While Zhang (*ibid.*) argues that Slow activism can be achieved through teaching practices that are steeped in feminism, we argue that the same can be said for research. Our research process has constituted an amalgamation of Slow scholarship (consistently revisiting data and ideas, giving space 'to think, write, read, research, analyze, edit, organize' [Mountz *et al.*, 2015, p. 1236]); Slow activism (developing friendship as method and putting our emotional needs first, forsaking academic production ideals) and Slow Ontology (centring 'writing as a site of creative intervention' [Ulmer, 2017, p. 201]). As such, our feminist underpinning—encompassing relationality, an ethics of care and a deliberate thoughtfulness, in which 'we reassemble ourselves through the ordinary, everyday and often painstaking work of looking after ourselves; looking after each other' (Ahmed, 2014)—may be termed *Slow Feminism*.

methodology

Collaborative autoethnography is a methodological approach utilising autoethnography which 'engages two or more autoethnographers in a research team to pool their lived experiences on selected sociocultural phenomena and collaboratively analyze and interpret them for commonalities and differences' (Hernandez, Chang and Ngunjiri, 2017, pp. 31–32). Whereas autoethnography is an exploration of the self within specific cultural, emotional and social contexts, collaborative autoethnography provides space for further critical engagement with the experiences of the self/ves within these contexts and provokes disruption of otherwise hegemonic forces through collaboration and critique (*ibid.*).

Collaborative autoethnography is considered more ethical than autoethnography as it recognises the interplay between the self and the other, which is centred through highly relational research practices (Lapadat, 2017). It is similar to relational autoethnography (Ellis and Rawicki, 2013), which is about engaging with one another's lived experiences with empathy and care; duoethnography (Norris, 2017), which is about two researchers engaging with one another in a collaborative, fluid way; or collective autoethnography, whereby group members interview one another about their experiences (Karalis Noel, Minematsu and Bosca, 2023). All of these processes are impacted, however, by embodied biases (Leboeuf, 2020) and the issue of utilising an ethics of care, which meant that we were putting our relationship and attunement to one another's emotional needs ahead of the research process, which can impede data generation and create additional unintentional biases through the reflective, reflexive and relational features of our original FCAE (Badley, 2022; Nind, Coverdale and Meckin, 2022).

Our initial FCAE consisted of five months of fortnightly online meetings combined with asynchronous communication in between. Between meetings, we each kept individual reflective diaries, and over time added poetry and free writing. Through online meetings we shared this reflective work, our most private thoughts and experiences, and engaged with one another's work utilising supportive prompts, compassionate challenge and an ethics of care. In this context, an ethics of care could be understood as:

> an ethical orientation highlighting concrete and nuanced perception and understanding—including an attunement to the reality of other people and to the actual relational contexts we find ourselves in [which] asserts the importance of an active concern for the good of others and of community with them, of a capacity for sympathetic and imaginative projection into the position of others, and of situation-attuned responses to others' needs. (Carse, 1995, cited in Maeckelberghe, 2004, p. 319)

This collaborative but supportive engagement was both affective and effective in eliciting further reflexivity. Since these meetings began in 2020, we have continued to meet and explore different methods that can be applied to our FCAE methodological approach, including utilising the LG (for further information, see Yeo *et al.*, 2023). This has resulted in a raft of qualitative data, much of which captures our frustrations at being disabled women in higher education.

To encourage depth of enquiry, we engaged in a two-phase analytical process. Firstly, Nikki sifted through FCAE audio data to find examples of where our collective discussed experiences of disability, whilst Emma found the examples of disability we had explored when utilising the LG for a prior publication (Yeo *et al.*, 2023). As our FCAE is a methodology underpinned by a feminist epistemology, we have been influenced by the work of Sandra L. Faulkner (2005, 2017, 2018), who advocates the use of poetic inquiry as feminist methodology. We have embraced poetry created via the LG process to explore our embodied and emotional responses to said identities and positionalities (Faulkner, 2005). By including poetic inquiry, we were able to challenge and affirm discourses that we have applied to our experiences and identities. Therefore, poetry is fitting in this research context not only to create research outcomes that are potentially resonant and evocative but also because poetic inquiry can be 'an active response to social issues, a political commentary and a call to action' (Faulkner, 2018, p. 2). Like Faulkner (2017, p. 93), we believe that poetry has bifurcating but complementary outcomes as it has 'the power to highlight slippery identity-negotiation processes and present more nuanced views of marginalized and stigmatized identities'. As such, the FCAE process and the creation of poems has aided us in developing a critical consciousness necessary for empowerment, which we view as a tool for resistance (hooks, 2003).

For our second phase, we engaged in an FCAE session to discuss this data and our subsequent reflections. This approach assisted us in 'being grounded and identifying our positionality as individuals immersed in the data through what we would consider *living the data*' (Rutter *et al.*, 2021, p. 5, emphasis in original). This critical but systematic immersion provided a space for a form of Slow Feminism. It was not urgent, nor was it a simply a necessary collective response to oppression, but rather it was a Slow, organic approach, steeped in a relational ethics of care, whereby we moved through the exploration of our data from '"just friends" [to] *just* friends, interpersonal and political allies who seek personal growth, meaningful relationships, and social justice' (Tillmann-Healy, 2003, p. 271), through the lens of being disabled women in academia.

Throughout our selection and analysis of the data, we engaged directly and deliberately with the emotional impact of this work. We each kept individual journals reflecting on the emotional impact of listening to and re-reading our transcripts, and on how our own recent experiences may have shaped our interpretations, considering that some of this data was a year old. Our positions had changed in terms of the pandemic, our academic positions but also our understanding of our disabled bodyminds. We borrow the term 'bodymind' from feminist Disability Studies scholar Margaret Price (2014, p. 4) who not only uses the term to denote the interlinking between mental and physical processes in a physical sense but also to represent 'a sociopolitically constituted and material entity that emerges through both structural (power- and violence-laden) contexts and also individual (specific) experience'. Therefore, our use of this term indicates that we consider disability to be experienced mentally, physically and systemically.

collaboration, catharsis and care

Invoking a Slow Ontology in writing and research concerns 'not how we can find a slower way of doing scholarship, but how we can find a slower way of scholarly being' (Ulmer, 2017, p. 202). We found that undertaking the initial FCAE project and the subsequent revisitation of the data allowed us not only to reorientate our research approaches towards Slow scholarship but also to re-understand our Feminism as Slow, utilising reflexivity which is particularly important in the research process for disabled people (Doonan, 2021). Participation in the longitudinal collaborative feminist research process helped us to begin to process our own changing identities, as we straddled intersecting marginalised societal positionalities (gender, disability, sexual orientation). We began to reclaim power over our own individual narratives, while at the same time being able to identify and proffer in our poetic and narrative explorations 'not a singular, universal voice, but experiences that cut across multiple trajectories representing different times in our lives' (Mountz *et al.*, 2015, p. 1239).

Reframing our experiences, although eventually cathartic, was not easy in an emotional sense. However, we navigated difficult contemporaneous moments together through discussion, comfort and active listening, and in taking this caring approach we were also able to begin to (re)process past difficulties related to our identities as disabled women. These concurrent outcomes could only have been achieved through Slow Feminism, as ethical collaborative work should be 'care-full' (Shefer and Bozalek, 2022, p. 35) and Slow:

> Talking to others who are involved in my story is important. I gain self-assurance, while they gain important information as well as the opportunity to consider that understanding my experiences may enrich their own lives. When I follow this line of thinking, I feel as if I am able to find my feminist voice. (Ettorre, 2017, p. 16)

Below we present our feminist voice(s) in various forms: poems created from our FCAE data, using the stepped LG process (for further details, see Yeo et al., 2023), excerpts from our reflective diaries and reflexive challenge provoked within the final FCAE session. Poems are presented following Christine Woodcock (2016), with the first column representing the 'I', the second column the 'you' and the third column the 'they' or 'them'. Each heading exemplifies that which we believe represents the politics of

Slow Feminism in which intra-action and connecting with others about their thoughts and experiences are crucial to facilitate new (re)understandings (Bozalek, 2017).

apology

Throughout our talk data, we found demonstrations of otherwise internalised struggles between different aspects of our identities. This revealed our imposter syndrome; it exacerbated feelings of being burdensome; it emphasised how much space we dared to take up in the world, similar to the issues found by Christina Doonan (2021) when exploring the Body Politic through a disabled lens during COVID-19. Repeatedly, we would apologise for speaking up, for speaking out, for engaging in activity where we had not only been offered a seat at the table, but it was the table we had created and claimed for ourselves. For instance, one of us apologised for asking another to arrange a meeting; rather than recognising her role as chair of that meeting, she framed the request as an imposition upon another:

> *I think it's a good, like, reflection point.*
>
> *I'm, like, put it in the diary because*
>
> *You're the organiser.*
>
> *I'm sorry.*

This example suggests a lack of either confidence or perceived self-worth, especially given the hedging around the decision on the timing of the meeting 'I think', and the repetition of the word 'like', used as unnecessary verbal punctuation, denoting hesitancy and thereby giving the speaker time to carefully formulate the remainder of their sentence.

We felt we needed additional time to reflect upon this tendency to apologise, as the repeated listens to the transcripts highlighted that it was ingrained. The seemingly innocuous exchange regarding the meeting exemplified in the poem above, supposedly couched in politeness, betrayed that we had internalised and perpetuated narratives of silent, subordinate women who should not take up space. Despite being committed feminists, we had absorbed and perpetuated this. These apologetic poems were categorised as embodying what we refer to as 'the politics of sorry', and we believe sorry is a word employed more by women than men, and there is some evidence to support this (Schumann and Ross, 2010). However, as a compassionate collective, promoting an ethics of care and feminist principles, one of our first engagements with a Slow Feminism was to identify and 'call out' one another for apologising. To identify where we were taking up less space or reducing our sense of self-worth. Our first step was to avoid apologising to one another for just existing. It was harder than we anticipated.

Feminist Disability Studies has highlighted the 'more personal experiences of oppression which operate at the emotional level' (Thomas, 1999, cited in Reeve, 2006, p. 95). These micro-impacts of disability on the individual self are often caused by the prevalence of disabling macro-forces that create tropes of 'other', in which those who can't meet normative concepts of productivity are sidelined. These systemic avenues of exclusion forcibly remind the disabled person that they are not welcome, not accepted, not good enough, causing us to fall into the trap of internalising 'essentialist definitions of disability as inferior embodiment' (Goethals, De Schauwer and Van Hove, 2015, p. 76). Hence the reliance on apology as an explainer, an excuser and an exemplifier throughout the data:

> *I couldn't read.*
>
> *I couldn't write.*
>
> *I shouldn't be apologising for having an opinion.*
>
> *I keep on saying sorry.*
>
> *I can't stop saying sorry!*
>
> *I'm sorry,*
>
> *I'm sorry.*
>
> *I'm like:*
>
> *'What, are you sorry for having a disability?'*
>
> *You didn't sleep last night.*
>
> *You couldn't stop saying sorry.*
>
> *I don't know if it's a female thing or a disabled thing—*
>
> *you have to be sorry for existing.*
>
> *You shouldn't apologise for being alive.*

The move to and from first and second person is perhaps representative of the suppressed desire to distance ourselves from our *selves*, perhaps demonstrating a subconscious desire to reject, or at least diminish, our disabled identities. This is potentially due to the prevalent narrative of vulnerability in policy and society during the pandemic and trying to understand our positionality in relation to this. It may also have been a result of the dehumanising process we experienced because of a lack of support (financial, structural, emotional) from those in positions of power during the pandemic. Indeed, even the shift in language choice from 'disabled' to 'having a disability' denotes the speaker's (subconscious) change from invoking the social model to the medical model of disability—from something wrong with society to something 'wrong' with the individual. Nevertheless, we strived to reject this narrative through Slow Feminism. We were not burdensome. We were not taking up too much space, or too much time. '*We do not say sorry*' became an emblematic symbol within our research group as we embraced acceptance of one another, not only as women academics but as *disabled* women academics who dared to say that their experiences *mattered*.

anger

Whilst all students faced significant barriers due to the pandemic, disabled students faced additional 'disabling disruptions' (Shakespeare *et al.*, 2022), not least related to well-being. Overall, 46 per cent of disabled people expressed that the pandemic had caused a decline in their mental health, as opposed to 18 per cent of non-disabled people (Office for National Statistics, 2020). This pattern was seen to continue into 2021, when 67 per cent of disabled people attributed ongoing anxiety to COVID-19 (Office for National Statistics, 2021). This emotional turmoil was reflected in our talk data; however, we noted a transition over time from anxiety to anger. Whereas our initial emotional tendency to internalise fears and blame ourselves for many of our difficulties was reflected in our constant use of 'sorry', as we moved through the pandemic this turned to anger.

In the following written reflection, we moved away from internalising our anger, which had physically manifested itself as 'a constrictive ball in the back of the throat … all-consuming', provoking self-loathing, self-questioning and imposter syndrome. Instead, through the FCAE process, we began to (re)understand our experiences, and (re)direct our anger externally at the oppressive structural forces that were clearly and unapologetically perpetuating inequality towards marginalised societal groups during the pandemic:

> I'm angry that Black people are being murdered, violently and immediately, or slowly and neglectfully, but always deliberately, by the carceral state. I'm angry that white people in positions of privilege and power use those positions to perpetuate inequality. Not just leaders and institutions, but individuals. I'm angry at [narratives of] transphobia … actively harming [trans people] at a time of already-enhanced danger and vulnerability. I'm angry that the government has failed to protect disabled people, has forgotten shielders, is prioritising the economy over social welfare. I'm angry that universities are not protecting their students. Are paying lip service to the umbrella term of 'diversity' rather than implementing any meaningful change.

As we recounted tales of symbolic oppression due to our identities as disabled women, we found solace and support through our collective. However, it must be noted that we are aware that despite occupying multiply marginalised identities as disabled women from working-class backgrounds, we also acknowledge that we also hold characteristics which bestow societal privilege, and we express our solidarity with others who have experienced oppression in academia and beyond due to any facet of their community or identity. We believe that it is not the job of a particular oppressed group to solve the structural inequality they face alone. Instead, we ascribe to Sara Ahmed's notion of solidarity:

> Solidarity does not assume that our struggles are the same struggles, or that our pain is the same pain, or that our hope is for the same future. Solidarity involves commitment, and work, as well as the recognition that even if we do not have the same feelings, or the same lives, or the same bodies, we do live on common ground. (Ahmed, 2004, p. 189)

We felt there was an obvious contrast between our language choices and those especially of the cisgender white men we often encounter as powerful figures within the academic hegemony. Instead of dwelling on our own individual positionalities, we were able to collectively understand ourselves as part of wider systemic oppression through a Slow Feminism underpinned by an ethics of care. This allowed us to stop internalising the sadness we felt and reframe it as anger: a positively disruptive force, thus giving us hope that we can undermine the misogynistic and ableist narratives that have been forced on us not only during the pandemic but throughout our lives:

I think anger is a really positive emotion.

I'm happy to be called angry,

I don't like the way

society uses it against women.

Do you like being called the 'angry woman'?

Do you like the term angry or because society has deemed it so wrong?

You're kind of more rebellious to take it on.

You get what I mean, though.

I'm trying to say:

yeah, embrace your anger.

Fuck them.

The politics of anger are often utilised as an argument against moral outrage, which is rooted in anger and helplessness (Macamo, 2011). Furthermore, the 'angry woman' is often positioned as irrational, untrustworthy, hysterical, which weaponises our distress against us. However, through our FCAE we were able to reflect on this. As the above poem is presented with multiple researcher voices, we recognised the tensions and support created by our research conversations (Yeo *et al*., 2023); we spoke together in support of one another's emotional distress, the injustices we have experienced and the manifestations of our oppressions. This support of anger was another form of Slow Feminism, as it was about collaboratively working towards the acceptance that we are *allowed* to have feelings. We allowed ourselves, and provided space for one another, to explore and translate those feelings into something that was not only accepted but expected. Why should we not be angry at those who try to make us small? Why should we not reframe our constructions of self to finally celebrate the ferocity and immense love and compassion that can be held by the angry woman?

snap

The outcomes of this feminist collective research process could be said to constitute a 'feminist snap' (Ahmed, 2017, p. 187). Using FCAE embedded the reflexivity in the research process necessary to truly exemplify an ethics of care. In turn, this has allowed us to think and reflect 'more creatively and affirmatively about breaking points' that we have faced inside and outside of academia (*ibid.*). The pandemic represented a connotation of a snap as potentially a destructive breaking point, but FCAE helped us (re)understand our experiences in a way that enabled us to 'share a refusal' (*ibid.*, p. 185) to remain in thrall to the neoliberal patriarchal forces represented by institutional power hierarchies in higher education. Because we adhered to a relational ethical approach, underpinned by a praxis of care (Rutter et al., 2021), we were able to have the confidence to risk pain and vulnerability to use our experiences to make 'visible the oppressive structures of a culture' (Denzin, 2013, p. 139). Instead, using the anger this oppression engendered allowed us to become empowered as disabled women, and friends.

discomfort and physical distress

One of our earliest findings related to how, when our FCAE sessions were listened to by their own speakers, the affective impact was different, exemplifying how the act of remembering through listening can be both therapeutic and challenging (Yeo *et al.*, 2023). In writing about the non-linguistic cues present within the data, there were revelatory insights as one of us showed clear discomfort and pain behind otherwise confident words. As seen below, the notes on listening to the data highlighted details that could not be ascertained from reading alone. Through embracing both reflection and reflexivity in listening to talk data, she identified the hidden discomfort present in her thoughts betrayed by her body's reaction. In the recording, she coughed involuntarily after another asks about the experience of disclosure of her mental health conditions. She sighed deeply before responding, preparing for the inevitable physical impact of recalling emotionally painful experiences:

> 'I, I share stuff about my mental health ...'. A marked silence occurs after the first 'I'. I think it is because I am trying to work out how to formulate my words. Is this because I want to avoid triggering others or myself? Or is it indicative of the (subconscious) energy that it takes for me to talk about my mental health, despite being an advocate? Or was it because I was being asked to 'relive everything again and again' and think back to a traumatic time. As someone with PTSD, I get physical symptoms related to trauma. My very careful and measured tone here could be due to me trying to manage this by tricking the brain into not realis[ing] that I am reflecting on traumatic experiences here.

Another author undertook one of her listens following a distressing experience of disability discrimination. She noted in her reflective notes when revisiting another traumatic experience in the data that it had a profound, almost triggering impact:

> I was shaking a little and almost crying; unable to express myself and it was awful—all stemming from the issues I've talked about the lady ... who lied about me. I've got real trust issues surrounding belief in my disability since then.

Continuing to listen to the data, including focused listens exploring affectivity and emotionality (Yeo *et al.*, 2023), allowed her to identify that her discomfort was associated with her past experiences with professionals, and the impact of these experiences on how she experiences the world years later. Although conducting the listen was emotionally difficult, she came away with an increased understanding of how this trauma has affected her bodymind, which was empowering, while the process of utilising the framing of 'we' also granted us power collectively.

changemakers

As we revisited and discussed difficult moments in our past, not just our present, situations, the contradictions between oppression and resistance, and between anger and sadness, came to the fore in our discussions regarding our lived experiences as disabled women. Sometimes emotions were framed as negative, but they could also be a force for change:

I said what's been done

who that person actually is as a human being

the role they have in your life

how you say that

how you see yourself

they could be anyone

they're quite faceless

they represent power

undermining me as a disabled person, as a woman, as a student

I couldn't care less if they liked me or not.

I could.

For Emma, discussing her experience as a disabled woman involved revisiting traumatic moments during the pandemic. Listening to audio recordings in which she shared the challenges she faced engaging with society at a time when both a lack of understanding and face-mask regulations isolated her, she reacted emotionally and produced a written response sharing how unsettling it was to hear her own desperation throughout the pandemic to engage while struggling to do so, needing to justify her disabilities and share private details of her life with strangers in order to access basic aspects of everyday life:

> I didn't have my mask exemption lanyard with me and said I was exempt … He was tall, had a face mask dangling from his fingers and it honestly felt like he was looming over me … they refused to serve me …

The pandemic added a new dimension to Emma's experience of disabling attitudes and environments. Previously, she had struggled to listen to conversations in loud places due to sensory sensitivities. During the pandemic the addition of face masks, which muffle sound and prevent lip-reading, plus the rise in the use of video-conferencing technology, isolated her further, preventing her from finding mitigations from otherwise 'overwhelming sensory landscapes' (Felepchuk, 2021). She was reluctant to take part in face-to-face activities at university once they resumed due to her inability to understand what was being said and need to explain her mask exemption; this remained the case until university mask mandates were altered in February 2022.

Listening in a deeply involved manner can be an emotionally challenging experience and researchers must be aware of this while undergoing the process. Our strength as a collective, with overlapping experiences as disabled women, allowed us to support each other during challenging moments, while individual reflection gave us the space to reflect. This Slow Feminism, underpinned by kindness, compassion and *patience*, improved how we understood and interpreted our negative experiences so profoundly, embodying the process of '*just* friends' (Tillmann-Healy, 2003, p. 271), and our commitment to positive feminist activism in a Slow, more considered and more cathartic way.

conclusion

As disabled women academics taking up space in otherwise hegemonic academic spaces, we found ourselves during the COVID-19 pandemic apologising for existing, overwhelmed by frustration and anger and frequently finding our disabled bodies *betraying* our emotional states. However, through our FCAE we aimed to come together to re-understand our individual traumatic experiences through a collective lens. We gained much more. We gained friendship and collaborators and engaged in a process of catharsis to reframe our experiences not only of the pandemic but as disabled women. Our FCAE has previously been recognised as a unique contribution to autoethnographic writing by extending the reflective, reflexive and relational features of collaborative autoethnography (Badley, 2022; Nind, Coverdale and Meckin, 2022). However, by applying it longitudinally, we posit that it also has a future in promoting a form of Slow Feminism which can assist marginalised women in reframing and empowering their otherwise difficult circumstances collectively.

Whilst our authorship group is not representative of all women who have experiences of oppression, and their complex intersecting identities, we recognise the importance of providing spaces for those who may experience different oppressions to our own, who may have been silenced because of who they are. Who were not hard to reach, but easy to ignore, due to systemic structural and symbolic oppressions. We do not expect our experiences to be generalisable but relatable, and reflective of how important it is to be provided with space and community.

Throughout our work together, we have engaged in a feminist epistemological process that was underpinned by compassion and an ethics of care. It has not been without conflict, and we have consistently challenged one another when we minimised our experiences, apologised for existing or attempted to reject our authentic emotionality. We supported one another to frame our understanding to a more honest, open, vulnerable but positive self-perception. Most importantly, we co-created and held space for that vulnerability and honesty in a way which did not negate but validated experiences in a way entrenched in care and promoting catharsis.

Poetry was a particularly useful tool in establishing where our individual and collective identities differed, and it also highlighted where we stepped in and stepped up to support our collaborators. It emphasised where we reconsidered what constant apologies may mean for our individual identities, but also what it may represent for womanhood. The FCAE, when utilising audio, written and reflective data, brought to the fore how we supported one another to take up space, and engage in a Slow Feminism that is not the quick emergence or responses to significant oppressions, but the slower reimagining of how we can rethink our own position in academia and society. It is slower, but kind, reflective and considered, and does not shy away from challenging internalised oppressions.

Future research should consider how collaboration between women can be a step towards understanding this Slow Feminism. What does this mean for longitudinal autoethnographic and collaborative autoethnographic work when critiquing hegemonic powers? The slow reframing of who we are as women, and the slow analysis which identified our internalised misogyny, helped to challenge these internalised narratives. The slow but organic process of building friendships, and building care, assisted us in interrogating one's own voice through our reflective journals. We engaged in Slow scholarship through our research projects during the pandemic through necessity; we engaged in Slow Feminism during the pandemic through choice and care. Future work should be just as intentional.

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