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Remembering and anticipating researcher vulnerability: an autoethnographic tale

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ABSTRACT

Whilst there is nascent literature surrounding researcher vulnerability, little is known about how memories and anticipations can elicit researcher vulnerabilities, and vulnerable academic writing can still be met with some scepticism. In this paper, I therefore provide an autoethnographic narrative of my encounters with researcher vulnerability during research into tattoos, time, and death. My tale revolves around three themes: *Remembering vulnerabilities*, *(Un)anticipating vulnerabilities*, and *Fluctuating vulnerabilities*. In doing so, I reveal not only how vulnerabilities can fluctuate through time and space, but also how past memories and future anticipations can stir present-day researcher vulnerabilities. Ultimately, I move beyond the 'vulnerability as failure' framing by helping to encourage an academic culture that celebrates being open about researcher vulnerability and writing more vulnerably.

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Introduction: researcher vulnerability as failure?

In this paper, I open myself up to vulnerability by providing first-hand accounts of my experiences of researcher vulnerability during research on tattoos, time and death. In doing so, I reveal how researcher vulnerabilities can fluctuate and be elicited through memories and anticipations. Vulnerability has etymological roots in the Latin for wound, 'vulnus' (Clark, 2021), inspiring definitions of vulnerability as the capacity to be 'physically or emotionally wounded' (Hoffmaster, 2006, p. 38), and encounter 'breakability, crushability, fragility, [and] frailty' (Baker et al., 2005, p. 128). However, vulnerability has long been considered a personal failure to be pushed away as soon as it emerges, thus demonstrating the close links between vulnerability and this special issue theme of failure. As Shildrick (2002) explains, vulnerability is portrayed as '…a shortcoming, an impending failure both of form and function …' (p. 71), with those succumbing to vulnerability depicted as ' …either weak or unfortunate, beset by either or both moral and material failure' (Shildrick, 2000, p. 217).

In the context of academic research, university ethics protocols typically frame vulnerability as something to be 'avoided, mitigated and managed' (Borgstrom & Ellis, 2021, p. 591), and hence a researcher encountering vulnerabilities can be deemed as failing to be a

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successful, competent and ethical researcher. Within the neoliberal university, we are socialised into hitting metrics, competitiveness, and individualism (Harrowell et al., 2018; Prothero, 2017), which involves framing our methodologies in traditional ways suppressing the confessional (Mamali, 2019). Insecurities, awkward encounters, and personal emotions are typically omitted from academic writing to avoid charges of being 'unscientific', 'unrigorous' and 'unscholarly' (Bochner, 2000). Whilst there is growing recognition of research 'messiness', this rarely makes it into published work; or where it does, it becomes 'a euphemism for failure' (Harrowell et al., 2018, p. 232). And hence, academics can often present themselves as ' . . .flawless, effective, powerful, bigtime, impactful, rational, certain, heroic, self-assuredly eloquent, upwardly mobile' (Horton, 2020a, p. 5).

Equally, confronting perceived failure can stir feelings of vulnerability (Harrowell et al., 2018), and academics regularly confront multiple perceived failures due to research not going to plan, or not feeling productive, successful or impactful enough (Horton, 2020b). As one example, failing to secure research funding, gain adequate supervisory support, or recruit participants can lead to doctoral researchers failing to complete their thesis on time (Ballamingie & Johnson, 2011), and thus potentially being vulnerable to not securing a job in the competitive academic market. To further illustrate, failing to publish quickly – or at all – from raw and emotional data which can take time to process, can render researchers vulnerable to missing project milestones, or deadlines for submitting outputs to institutional research exercises (Borgstrom & Ellis, 2021), which can hinder career progression.

As emerald and Carpenter (2015) therefore observe, ' . . .we take a great risk when we open ourselves up to the reflective turn' (p. 744). Some have bravely taken such risks. Since the 1980s, the subjective, co-constructed, and partiality of academic knowledge has been increasingly recognised (Shankar & Patterson, 2001), spreading beyond roots in feminist research, which has long foregrounded emotions, embodiment and positionality (Blakely, 2007). For example, open, emotive and embodied accounts of vulnerabilities experienced teaching as an early career lecturer have been provided (C. Wilkinson, 2020; S. Wilkinson, 2019). While in consumer research, narratives of personal – and sometimes emotional – consumption experiences can be found (e.g. Shankar, 2000; Takhar, 2020), in addition to candid accounts of researcher vulnerability (e.g. Jafari et al., 2013; Mamali, 2019).

There is, however, arguably scope to further build on this courageous work. In doing so, I contribute a more extended understanding of researcher vulnerability by revealing how it can be evoked by past memories and anticipated – or sometimes unexpected – futures, as well as oscillate through times and spaces. Understanding time and researcher vulnerability is important, since highlighting the role of memory and anticipation disrupts the typical emphasis on researcher vulnerability during the present-day fieldwork period (Borgstrom & Ellis, 2021), and instead encourages a more unbounded conceptualisation of academic research. Furthermore, attending to fieldwork spaces and vulnerability unsettles static views of vulnerability as a fixed position into which a person may be boxed, and instead contributes to more contextual understandings of vulnerability (Clark, 2021) by demonstrating how researcher vulnerabilities can fluctuate through and across different research (micro)spaces.

Below, I first explore literature surrounding vulnerable academic writing and researcher vulnerability, before outlining the autoethnographic approach and project drawn upon to

narrate my first-hand vulnerable research experiences. Next, I provide personal accounts around three themes: *Remembering vulnerabilities*, *(Un)anticipating vulnerabilities*, and *Fluctuating vulnerabilities*. I conclude by calling for a greater celebration of being open about researcher vulnerability to wrench it out of the murky shadows of failure.

Vulnerable academic writing

Academic research has been traditionally dominated by the positivistic ideal of the rational, objective and emotionally-detached scientist (Bettany & Woodruffe-Burton, 2009). This involves a false dichotomy between 'personal' and 'academic' selves (Bochner, 1997; Shankar & Patterson, 2001), which can translate into academic writing. Competitive academic publication systems encourage us to churn out papers at an increasingly accelerated rate, with many outlets favouring articles written in a traditional masculinist style conveying rigour, validity, and conclusiveness (Kiriakos & Tienari, 2018; van Eck et al., 2020). In practice, this leads to abstract third-person research accounts that seem as if ' . . .they're written from nowhere by nobody' (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 734). Even conventional forms of academic writing can make us feel vulnerable in anticipation of harsh reviewer criticisms and journal rejections (Grey & Sinclair, 2006). In likening academic writing to love, Kiriakos and Tienari (2018) observe:

> Whenever we do something with love, doubt and fear kick in . . . If we write sincerely, critical feedback from anonymous reviewers hurts. It feels like a slap in the face. The idea of someone somewhere glancing at your work and deeming it worthless is scary. (p. 270)

We therefore often bend to the will of traditional academic writing conventions to minimise such vulnerabilities. As Tourish (2020) reflects, 'submitting a paper to a top journal seems akin to becoming a hostage, with rejection . . . the ultimate sanction for disobedience' (pp. 103–104). To avoid such sanctions, our academic writing often becomes sanitised (van Eck et al., 2020), whereby vulnerable, embodied and messy research encounters often remain outside of academic publications in hushed conversations around the 'water-cooler' (Harris, 2015) – if they are disclosed at all. Accordingly, for Pullen (2018), academic writing is comparable to labiaplasty, whereby to fit into the system 'we tidy up our embodied writing which leaks – we edit, cleanse, correct and say what other people want us to say' (p. 125).

Yet vulnerable writing, which more explicitly foregrounds vulnerability and the partiality of academic knowledge production (Page, 2017), is slowly making it to publication and has for some time been prevalent within feminist scholarship (Blakely, 2007). Such personal writing further exposes academics to vulnerability due to standing outside of traditional academic writing conventions, meaning it is arguably more likely to be met with judgement, criticism and rejection. For example, C. Wilkinson (2020) provides candid accounts of the imposter syndrome she has faced as a lecturer, involving the physical rashes that sometimes accompany teaching anxieties. Similarly, S. Wilkinson (2019) reveals the dramaturgical strategies she employed as an early career lecturer to feel more assertive, such as putting her academic title onto slides and mentioning her publications during lectures.

More vulnerable writing can also be found in marketing and consumer research. Several scholars have provided introspective accounts of personal experiences with

identity and music consumption (Shankar, 2000); plastic surgery (Sayre, 1999); health issues (Prothero, 2017); having a 'short-sized female body' (Valtonen, 2012); reproductive technologies (Takhar, 2020); and ethical dilemmas faced in research (Khanijou & Pirani, 2021). For instance, Shankar (2000) discloses feeling as though he did not belong growing up due to his ethnic identity, noting how writing this autobiographical essay on music consumption and identity was 'a profoundly difficult, emotional experience' (p. 33). More recently, Prothero (2017) delivers a powerful introspective account of returning to the academic workplace following heart surgery, in which she experienced physical and emotional vulnerabilities, such as not being able to open heavy doors into the university, forgetting university login details and feeling overwhelmed.

There is also a small – but budding – number of consumer researchers writing poetic accounts expressing vulnerable experiences. Rojas-Gaviria (2021), for example, suggests the lens of 'poetising' can help to grasp experiences of humble vulnerability, when identity is in-process and not always under our control during heart-breaking times. She also provides a poem entitled *The Affective Tones of Academic Life*, in which the emotional ebbs and flows of an academic career are expressed, including 'burn-out', feeling 'not good enough', 'sleepless and restless' (Rojas-Gaviria, 2022, p. 13). Downey (2016) further suggests a poem ' . . .supports the elucidation of hidden narratives of more vulnerable inscapes' (p. 357) and can move readers affectively. She presents a poem entitled *Vulnerability in Parts*, which uncovers the 'liminality, hopelessness, marginalisation and voicelessness' (Downey, 2016, p. 361) those living with quadriplegia can experience. Downey (2021) also offers a poem about sexual harassment and the #MeToo movement which 'takes the reader journeying across many shadows of vulnerability, drawing on intimate experiences . . .' (p. 25). Whilst Preece et al. (2022) produce three poems both in written and audio formats to reveal the authors' first-hand vulnerable experiences landing in affective atmospheres of spiritual and religious settings.

Suspicion lingers, however, around revealing the personal within academic writing. And so, we still often construct 'a heavy intellectual muscle shell' (Sparkes, 1996, p. 485) to defend against the imagined criticisms of sceptical audiences, even when endeavouring to write more vulnerably. For example, reflecting on their personal processes of academic writing, Kiriakos and Tienari (2018) note how in earlier drafts they had left out ' . . .personal, and "fleshy" pieces of text in favour of more abstract and theoretical reflections' (p. 270). Equally, Sparkes (1996), in earlier accounts of his experiences with bodily injury containing a more heavily theorised start and end, was 'theoretically "tooled up" as if ready for gladiatorial combat' (p. 485). Furthermore, in their paper on embodied academic knowledge, Meriläinen et al. (2021) observe how their discussion section initially reverted to a more conventional theoretical style, as if they were 'wearing a suit' (p. 79). Finally, in their article about researcher vulnerability during death-focused research, Borgstrom and Ellis (2021) reflect how they originally '. . .selected certain examples rather than others in an effort to "protect" ourselves as "vulnerable researchers" from the risky and exposing nature of reflexive publication' (pp. 593–594). Consequently, it remains challenging to disclose researcher vulnerabilities in academic writing- a topic to which I now turn.

Researcher vulnerability

Vulnerability does not have a singular or fixed meaning, since it is debated and can manifest differently for different people (Bashir, 2020). For example, there are debates surrounding if vulnerability represents a more permanent status based on personal characteristics (e.g. sex, age, ethnicity, etc.) or, alternatively, a more fluid experience anyone can encounter owing to ever-evolving life events and situations (Baker et al., 2005; Clark, 2021; Hamilton et al., 2016). Challenging the traditional 'metaphor of labels', where particular sub-populations are fixed as vulnerable from the outset, Luna (2009), for example, calls for greater recognition of the processual and relational 'layers of vulnerability' intersecting to inform lived experiences.

Here, I focus on researcher vulnerability. There is much guidance within methods literature and university ethical procedures regarding protecting the anticipated vulnerabilities of research participants (Downey et al., 2007). Less attention, however, has been given to the potential vulnerabilities researchers may experience, as they are ordinarily considered the dominant party (Downey et al., 2007; Raheim et al., 2016; Scott et al., 2012). There is not a singular, clear or neat definition of researcher vulnerability. Based on interviews with researchers who have encountered vulnerability, however, Bashir (2020) identifies exposure to physical and/or emotional danger as a defining feature. Furthermore, Jafari et al. (2013) argue the degree and type of researcher vulnerability encountered depends on ' . . .the researchers' experience and skills, their level of immersion in their research contexts, and the characteristics and circumstances of their participants' (p. 1187). More recently, Saldaña (2018) introduced the concept of 'humble vulnerability' to describe researchers who are ' . . .open to empathic understanding, open to other people's fragilities and idiosyncrasies, open to messy collaboration, and open to bring wrong' (p. 6).

There is nascent literature across the social sciences providing accounts of researcher vulnerability, which further indicates how it manifests in practice. It suggests researcher vulnerability can be elicited through researchers' physical safety concerns (Bashir, 2020; Jafari et al., 2013; Micanovic et al., 2020); key informants not responding (Ballamingie & Johnson, 2011); ambiguous research roles (Davison, 2004; Harris, 2015; Kennedy, 2020; Mamali, 2019; Micanovic et al., 2020); feeling powerless to change participants' lives (Bashir, 2020; Harrowell et al., 2018; Jafari et al., 2013); and concerns about upholding ethical principles (Borgstrom & Ellis, 2021; Jafari et al., 2013; Khanijou & Pirani, 2021).

Most commonly, the charged emotional impact of research is highlighted, which can make researchers feel emotionally vulnerable (Bashir, 2020; Bluvstein et al., 2021; emerald & Carpenter, 2015; Harrowell et al., 2018; Jafari et al., 2013; Kennedy, 2020; Mamali, 2019; Micanovic et al., 2020; Rager, 2005; Raheim et al., 2016). To illustrate, following an interview with Linda, a breast cancer patient, Rager (2005) powerfully recalls '. . .the tears running down my own cheeks as I listened with both my head and my heart to what she was sharing' (p. 23). Likewise, during research on women's experiences of mothering children with a disability, emerald and Carpenter (2015) candidly recall feeling 'exhausted, emotionally drained, and annoyed . . .' (p. 742). Within marketing, Jafari et al. (2013) experienced 'fear, anxiety, sadness, frustration, grief, and guilt' (p. 1188) when conducting 'sensitive research' with vulnerable consumers, which negatively impacted their well-being. More recently, Mamali (2019) confessed feelings of 'guilt' when studying a

volunteer-run arts charity due to the seemingly instrumental nature of the research. Moreover, holding less cultural capital about the arts world than other volunteers meant finding her place during early stages of fieldwork was an 'agonising experience' (Mamali, 2019, p. 244).

There is also some recognition of how researcher vulnerabilities can fluctuate over time. Scott et al. (2012) introduce what they term a 'cringe spectrum' to demonstrate how researchers may drift in and out of positions of 'shyness' and 'reluctance' during research, with all researchers open to making mistakes when 'performing' as competent professionals. Through their personal narratives of conducting fieldwork in an art gallery, the authors unravel how each of them experienced instances of shyness in different situations, whether personally feeling more comfortable making phone calls or leading walk-around interviews. Similarly, 'shifting power dynamics' between researcher and participant can inform researcher vulnerabilities (Raheim et al., 2016). For example, Jafari et al. (2013) illustrate how, despite their assumed privilege in relation to participants' circumstances, they also encountered challenging situations which unsettled researcher-participant power dynamics.

As well as fluctuating over time, researcher vulnerabilities can also shift between and through spaces. Clark (2021) deploys the term 'contextual vulnerability' to demonstrate how it is not a closed space, but can become more or less heightened across different spaces, dependent on people's available resources to promote wellbeing. Certain spaces can intensify researcher vulnerability, especially when working as a lone researcher or travelling to and from research sites at dark. Projects can take researchers into unfamiliar, unsafe and isolated spaces, which can fuel emotional and physical vulnerability due to concerns over personal safety or feeling disorientated (Jafari et al., 2013), such as high-density neighbourhoods, isolated public transport hubs, and the unfamiliar spaces of participants' homes (Bashir, 2020). Conversely, 'backstage' areas can help researchers to ease any feelings of vulnerability, such as planning the research in the office, less conspicuous edges of fieldwork sites (Scott et al., 2012), and supportive social spaces to share vulnerable experiences (Butler-Rees & Robinson, 2020).

Although not usually the explicit focus, there is some acknowledgement of how researchers' memories can stimulate vulnerabilities for both quantitative (Bluvstein et al., 2021) and qualitative researchers. Regarding the latter, Harris (2015), a past heroin-user, reflects how interviewees pointing out injection marks on her arms, or seeing theirs, conjured unsettling memories of this difficult life period. Researcher vulnerability can also be elicited through 'triggers' reminding researchers of challenging research encounters (Bashir, 2020), whether listening back to interviews (Davison, 2004; Jafari et al., 2013; Micanovic et al., 2020); reading a related news story (Bashir, 2020); conducting similar future research (emerald & Carpenter, 2015); and embodied memories of holding sick informants' hands (Borgstrom & Ellis, 2021) or smells of participants' homes (Bashir, 2020).

Very little, however, has been written about anticipations and researcher vulnerabilities. It has been recognised how unanticipated events and emotions can make researchers feel unexpectedly vulnerable (Jafari et al., 2013). Ballamingie and Johnson (2011) observe how 'situations of researcher vulnerability are often difficult to anticipate' (p. 725); whilst Davison (2004) agrees that '. . .any researcher may encounter unexpectedly problematic and uncomfortable territory' (p. 381). Bashir (2020) therefore identifies how confronting the unexpected is a key driver of researcher vulnerability. However, although

the above suggests unanticipated situations can arouse vulnerability, it is not known how *anticipations* of challenging research situations before fieldwork begins might also elicit vulnerability.

In summary, most attention is given to researcher vulnerabilities arising during fieldwork and when interacting with participants. In comparison, the post-study period (Bashir, 2020; Borgstrom & Ellis, 2021), and especially the time before entering the field, have been neglected and arguably require further attention. I therefore highlight, not only how my own feelings of vulnerability fluctuated during research; but also how past memories and future anticipations punctuated the present moment of research to stimulate vulnerabilities. This theorisation helps to unsettle the myth of the neat, bounded and linear research process, as it is typically represented in methods textbooks and courses, and contributes a more extended notion of researcher vulnerability.

An autoethnographic approach

This paper is based on my three-year doctoral project regarding bodies, time, and tattoo consumption. In-depth interviews were conducted with 18 tattoo consumers, typically involving first, a life-history style interview concerning key life events and turning points, followed by a second interview relating to the tattooing – or omission – of important life events. Given material objects can hold stories (Woodward, 2019), participants were also asked to bring special possessions to the interviews to help narrate their life histories. I also spent time in three English tattoo studios, two tattoo conventions, and an art exhibition at Somerset House, London entitled 'Time: Tattoo Art Today', taking fieldnotes, photographs and videos. The approach was reminiscent of 'multi-sited ethnography' (Ekström, 2006) or 'patchwork ethnography' (Günel et al., 2020), which typically involve shorter-term participant observation across multiple sites, rather than long-term immersion within a single distant site.

Over time, through reading more literature and unfolding interview discussions, it became clear that death was highly linked to my primary focus on embodied temporality. Death subsequently became a key theme which I aimed to learn more about, including through attendance of the BODY WORLDS exhibition in Amsterdam and an exhibition entitled 'Death: The Human Experience' at Bristol Museum and Art Gallery. Finally, I regularly reflected on my research and tattooing experiences in a research diary kept throughout the project.

This project has been chosen for three key reasons. First, the longitudinal nature of the study helps to elucidate how researcher vulnerability might fluctuate over time, and be informed by memories and anticipations. Second, given I visited multiple fieldwork sites, it also enables me to explore how researcher vulnerabilities may oscillate through different spaces. Finally, death is a topic which can provoke particularly strong emotions in researchers (Turley, 2016; Woodthorpe, 2011), meaning the project is well-suited for probing into researcher vulnerability since, as indicated above, it is associated with emotionally-charged experiences.

To narrate my personal experiences with researcher vulnerability, I draw on my fieldnotes and research diary from the above project, taking an autoethnographic approach. This follows others who have utilised autoethnography to reveal the vulnerabilities experienced during academic research (emerald & Carpenter, 2015; Kennedy,

2020); and teaching (C. Wilkinson, 2020; S. Wilkinson, 2019), drawing on their diaries, written memos, reflective narratives, and/or recorded discussions to construct these vulnerable accounts. Whilst there is no singular understanding of autoethnography, Hackley (2007) observes how it typically involves reflexive positioning of the author within the text, use of biographical material, and subjective tone of writing. Ellis et al. (2011) further explain how the term stems from auto (personal experience), ethno (cultural), and graphy (analyse), meaning autoethnography involves the analysis of personal experience to inform understandings of wider culture. And hence, it goes beyond the writing of selves to also connecting personal experience to broader social and cultural phenomena (Denshire, 2014; Winkler, 2018). In my case, I narrate and analyse my personal experiences of researcher vulnerability to better understand and challenge the wider culture of academic research in which I am situated.

Autoethnography, however, has been charged for involving navel-gazing, self-absorption, narcissism, and self-indulgence (Ellis et al., 2011; Sparkes, 2000). Issues have also been raised regarding the use of memory when writing autoethnographic accounts (Hackley, 2007; Winkler, 2018) and attaining enough analytical distance from oneself (Wallendorf & Brucks, 1993). Hackley (2007) therefore remarks how autoethnography '. . .remains in the corner of the consumer research classroom' (p. 99). Yet like others, I recognise how autoethnographic writing can help reader and writer to navigate – and build knowledge *through* - emotions (Adams, 2012; Ellis et al., 2011); be more transparent about the researcher's position in – and impact on – the research (Ellis et al., 2011); offer greater accessibility to diverse audiences (Ellis et al., 2011); foreground silenced and taboo topics (Adams, 2012); and hold transformative potential (Ellis et al., 2011) – in this case, helping to contribute to a more open academic culture around researcher vulnerability.

I will now reveal my experiences with researcher vulnerability around three themes: *Remembering vulnerabilities*, *(Un)anticipating vulnerabilities*, and *Fluctuating vulnerabilities*.

My autoethnographic tale

Remembering vulnerabilities

Whilst much focus in researcher vulnerability literature is on the present-day fieldwork period (Borgstrom & Ellis, 2021), throughout my project I sometimes became haunted by past memories, which suffused the present moment with fresh feelings of vulnerability; raising painful old wounds uncomfortably to the surface. This was especially heightened when confronting the topic of death and illness during the study which, upon reflection, may have chosen *me*, just as much as I had chosen *it*. Indeed, whilst universities tend '. . . to focus on everything from the neck up' (Bochner, 2012, p. 212), academic knowledge production is intimately entangled with researchers' embodied histories (Harris, 2015; Meriläinen et al., 2021). As Puwar (2021) explains, '. . .we all carry incidents and experiences from the past with us. We are embodied beings as knowledge makers' (p. 5). Losing loved ones has long cast a shadow over my own life, having painfully lost my mum to breast cancer when I was 11-years old, followed by my grandparents and beloved pet cat. Not that I have ever forgotten about these deaths, of course. I even have a reminder of these family members permanently inscribed on my body through a memorial tattoo I acquired shortly before starting my PhD- a small, black infinity symbol on my ribs. Even when

planning my tattoo, I was pulled back into upsetting memories of seeing my mum in hospital shortly before her death, which have just echoed through time again when reading the following extract for inclusion in this paper:

> When lying in bed a couple of nights ago I was thinking about the meanings and memories attached to my first tattoo . . . I started to play out different memories I have, some of them happy such as when I used to go on holiday to Devon with my nana and granddad which was always fun, and others not so happy. These more unhappy memories included when my mum was dying in hospital and looked really pale and fragile in the hospital bed with tubes running up her nose and attached to her thin wrist . . . My dad and nana had taken me and my sister to see her in hospital . . . My sister and I were so young – she had just turned seven and me eleven – and so we didn't really understand what was going on . . . I remember looking behind me and seeing my nana carrying my sister away as she was crying . . . I remember being shocked about how weak and fragile my mum looked in that hospital bed. I was so scared but I always thought that she would just get better again . . . My dad told me to hold her hand, which was something I hadn't really done since I was very little . . . I didn't really know why he asked me to do it, but I did it anyway and now I'm glad I did, as in the end it was the last time I was ever able to hold my mum's hand . . . (*research diary*).

I first became keenly aware of researcher vulnerability, therefore, when sitting in the reflections room at the death exhibition I visited during fieldwork, which was especially designed to open up conversations about death. The dim lighting, sombre music, and philosophical messages projected on the walls summoned memories of those I have lost. Accompanied by acute feelings of anxiety, sadness, and emptiness, as I sat in this room writing my reflections about death on post-it-notes, as visitors were encouraged to do:

> I find myself at the end of the exhibition and opposite the reflections room . . . At the top of the back wall the following is projected: 'Start the conversation. Make your thoughts known. Let's talk about death'. I write about the mixed emotions I experienced throughout my visit and how I think the exhibit is important in desequestering death from UK society . . . I decide that my first note was a bit academic and next write a more personal message to people I have lost . . . Telling my mum, nana, granddad, and cat that I miss them and will always love them, and add it into the pit . . .Tears begin to fill my eyes as I reflect on my own mortality and the various people I have lost . . . (*fieldnotes*).

Memories of deceased family members were also recalled during interviews I conducted with tattoo consumers, as conversations about death and illness sometimes arose. Indeed, death is identified as a particularly challenging research topic holding the potential to elicit a researcher's emotional vulnerabilities (Woodthorpe, 2011). One notable example is unexpectedly learning that a participant had a brain tumour and that he planned to bring his radiotherapy mask along to our interview. This provoked strong emotional and embodied reactions, such as nervousness, chest pains, and tearfulness, both in anticipation of this interview and as our conversation unfolded. As his material reminder of his cancer treatments sat ominously on the desk in front of us, disturbing and unwanted memories were recalled of clumps of my mum's hair dotted around my childhood home, following her own (ultimately futile) chemotherapy treatments. I remember my mum's embarrassment at losing her hair. One time, one of my mum's friends came around the house to see how she was doing. Panicked at not having her wig on, my mum rushed into the bathroom. Her friend left my sister and I with a bag of 'worry dolls'. They didn't work. The following example thus chimes with emerald and Carpenter's (2015) observation of how researcher vulnerabilities can be roused through the 'unforgetting' of

memories once boxed away, which is also happening as I write this paragraph which has involved reflecting on my mum's hair loss:

> I was extremely nervous before meeting with [participant] for our interview, since I was worried that I would become visibly upset … Fortunately, I managed to maintain composed throughout the entire interview; however, despite trying to remain in the present throughout our conversation and concentrate solely on his life history, a few times difficult times from my own life history flashed into my awareness … This occurred when he was discussing his chemotherapy and radiotherapy treatments, and the resulting bodily changes from these such as his hair falling out, which caused me to experience flashbacks to when my mum was ill and her hair fell out in clumps following her own treatment. This memory only fluttered in my mind for a few seconds, before I fell back into the present moment and my participant's story. However, this recollection did cause my eyes to fill up and I felt a sharp stab in my chest momentarily (*research diary*).

As indicated in this extract, I was not only feeling vulnerable in this case because of recalling difficult personal memories, but also since I was 'worried that I would become visibly upset' in front of my participant. I feared showing emotion might not only make my participant feel uncomfortable but that it might also 'out me' as an unprofessional researcher. As Horton (2020a) notes, emotions such as anxiety, worry and unease are ' … silenced by many spaces of contemporary academia' (p. 2), whereby academics are expected to be certain, self-assured, and flawless, with emotionality constructed in a binary to intellectual work (emerald & Carpenter, 2015). Researchers, therefore, sometimes try to mask or suppress their emotions to maintain a veneer of professionalism (Micanovic et al., 2020), which can negatively impact their wellbeing (Jafari et al., 2013).

It was not only memories of my own life challenges that fostered researcher vulnerability, but also that of my participants', which sometimes echoed into the future to unsettle me all over again, particularly when listening back to interviews or (re)reading interview transcriptions, echoing others' experiences (Davison, 2004; Jafari et al., 2013). As I reflected, 'when listening to their [participants'] narratives, I often felt quite emotional or anxious in some way, either when conducting the actual interview itself or transcribing it afterwards' (*research diary*), supporting Fraser and Puwar's (2008) observation of how we 'carry the smells, textures, pains, desires, sounds and the visual store of memories of the research encounter with us' (p. 2). In the below example, listening back to a participant's emotional interview, where she had tearfully recounted challenges within her family life, caused me to 'well-up' and feel upset myself. In this sense, through revisiting interview data I sometimes experienced the 'difficult re-living of the distress' of participants (Davison, 2004, p. 389):

> Today I was transcribing [participant's] interview and so had to re-experience her strong emotions whilst recounting her tattoo meanings to me, whereby she began crying in the interview and was quite highly emotional throughout. Hearing her crying as I was re-listening to the interview made me feel quite emotional myself and I started to well-up a bit at times (*research diary*).

In summary, it was not only because my research happened to be about the particularly emotionally-charged topic of death (Turley, 2016; Woodthorpe, 2011) that memory played such a prominent role. Rather, any researcher interacting with participants can be exposed to feeling emotionally vulnerable when others' difficult life experiences or challenging past research situations 'cling' beyond the original research encounter

(Jafari et al., 2013). This signals how it is important to recognise how research situations, such as interviews, do not just have an emotional 'afterlife' for participants (Leahy, 2022), but can also leave an 'affective residue' (Harrowell et al., 2018) on researchers.

(Un)anticipating vulnerabilities

My researcher vulnerabilities were also aroused through the murkiness of unanticipated futures, echoing Downey et al.'s (2007) observation of how '. . .it is difficult to predict in advance exactly how the research will impact on the researcher and what vulnerabilities will be encountered . . .' (p. 738). This might reflect my inexperience at the time, given my only significant research before embarking on my PhD had been smaller-scale masters' and undergraduate projects. Whilst I anticipated my research would lead to a certain level of emotional reaction and reflection given the topic and methodology, I was unprepared for just how emotionally-crippling the research would at times become. In the following extract, reviewing literature surrounding – and writing about – human mortality elicited anxieties about my inescapable future death and fleshy vulnerability:

> I have just been writing the section of my literature review about death (whilst listening to Lana Del Rey's 'Born to Die'- bad choice!), and a wave of anxiety just rushed over me. I began to think about what happens after death, imagining some sort of black void, and suddenly felt acutely anxious about my own certain demise. I feel a slight pain in my chest and I'm becoming paranoid that it's the beginning of my end, even though I know that began at birth (*research diary*).

This example reflects how the unexpected can be a key driver of researcher vulnerability, as it can make researchers feel unprepared and out of control (Bashir, 2020). However, to encounter unexpected difficulties and vulnerabilities during research – which is potentially even more likely for inexperienced doctoral researchers (Ballamingie & Johnson, 2011)– may challenge a researcher's sense of professionalism, as it deviates from the notion of the 'ideal researcher' who is always assertive and in control (Scott et al., 2012).

Lingering anxieties about future research situations I was able to anticipate (whether these imagined scenarios came to fruition or not) also stimulated my vulnerabilities. For instance, there were some fieldwork sites in which I anticipated I would not belong, especially tattoo-focused environments given I am not heavily tattooed. This was especially the case at the beginning of my project, due to limited past experiences in these spaces and as yet unformed bonds with those working within them. This meant my earlier visits to such fieldwork sites were often accompanied by anticipatory anxiety and social awkwardness. And so, the painstaking routine of morphing my body into something I imagined would 'pass' in such environments would begin, resonating with how C. Wilkinson (2020) strategically chose her outfits before teaching, as a 'backstage rehearsal' to being taken seriously as a competent lecturer. In my case, this involved apprehensively rummaging through my wardrobe to find a 'suitable' outfit in the angst-ridden 24-hour lead up to fieldwork – usually comprising a leather biker jacket:

> I was very unsure of what to wear to the tattoo convention, and I was very aware of trying to create some sort of 'rocky' or 'punky' outward image with my clothing, to do my best to fit in with the others who I imagined would be there. I thought that then at least some part of my

> body would seem 'in place', even if my skin would perhaps place me within the relatively uninked minority. After a while of gazing at my wardrobe deliberating about what to wear, I realised that I was probably being a bit ridiculous and I settled upon something I would ordinarily wear on an everyday basis … Yet with an added metal chain necklace, black haematite bracelet, and a black leather biker jacket (*fieldnotes*).

From this extract, is it clear I anticipated I would fall outside of the 'somatic norm' of tattooing spaces and feel like a 'body out of place' (Puwar, 2004). Yet, although many researchers – including myself – can feel self-conscious, shy or awkward when conducting fieldwork, in a masculinist academic culture we are socialised into masking such emotions to ensure our reputation remains intact and 'to spare our own blushes' (Scott et al., 2012, p. 718). Researchers therefore often employ strategies of impression management to cover up any embodied behaviours which would belie performances of academic competence (Mamali, 2019; Scott et al., 2012), as I did with my outfit choices to feel more confident.

The final way my vulnerabilities were elicited by anticipations was through the imagined future audiences of my writing. As Pullen (2018) observes, 'writing exposes, and with this exposure, we get cast in a sea of risk, insecurity and vulnerability' (p. 123). Given I was conducting life history-style interviews, participants often recounted emotive tales of challenging events. This meant I often worried about how I would represent such narratives due to feeling protective about my participants and obligated to 'do justice' to their stories, as other researchers have similarly expressed concerns about (Jafari et al., 2013). For example, I reflected how 'I am worrying a bit about how personal and emotional some of the narratives my informants have provided me with are, and how I am going to represent and do justice to these …' (*research diary*). This resonates with concerns over the transactional nature of academic research (Mamali, 2019) and the idea of 'holidaying on other people's misery' (McRobbie, 1982, p. 55, as cited in Davison, 2004). Accordingly, this sense of moral responsibility to not harm participants can become a source of vulnerability in itself, as researchers become stalked with anxiety about upholding, and not being perceived as deviating from, their duty of care to participants (Borgstrom & Ellis, 2021).

However, it was not only writing about my participants' lives which made me feel vulnerable, but also my own experiences, as I included my personal tattooing experiences as autoethnographic data. Whilst the academic publication system encourages researchers to produce 'deceptively tidy' (Harris, 2015, p. 1690) research accounts, I instead allowed my affective, embodied and messy encounters to 'leak' out of my writing (Pullen, 2018), which made me feel exposed and vulnerable to the imagined criticisms of others:

> Something I have also been pondering over in recent weeks is how to present my own personal experiences in my thesis … I think that it is very important to remain reflexive and transparent about how our own biographies influence the research process … Yet, I am concerned that other academics could read my thesis and judge me negatively by laying myself so bare … I don't feel that I can completely hide away my own life and tattooing experiences from my thesis … If my informants are laying themselves bare to me, shouldn't I be expected to do the same? (*research diary*).

In this extract, I deliberated over how much of the personal to reveal in my writing – like others before me have (e.g. Sparkes, 1996)– to avoid other academics 'judging me

negatively'. Indeed, personal writing exposes the researcher to potentially being perceived as self-indulgent and incompetent and subjected to negative reviewer comments and journal rejections (Kiriakos & Tienari, 2018); which not only stings, but also renders academics vulnerable to not securing or maintaining academic posts, research funding, or promotions. Emotional encounters, therefore, are usually edited out as part of a wider academic 'culture of silence' around researcher vulnerabilities (Butler-Rees & Robinson, 2020).

In summary, the accounts discussed in this theme temporally and spatially stretch what is typically considered to be a more neatly bounded and linear research process (Bettany & Woodruffe-Burton, 2009; Harrowell et al., 2018) by revealing how future anticipations, like memories, suffused my present-day researcher vulnerabilities, whether through worries about how future data collection encounters might unfold or the judgement of future readers. However, whilst university ethics procedures imply vulnerability should be knowable in advance (Borgstrom & Ellis, 2021), this theme also indicated how it is important to recognise how research often twists and turns in serendipitous ways, meaning researcher vulnerability can also be unexpectedly provoked.

Fluctuating vulnerabilities

I am not, however, fixed as an always-vulnerable researcher; nor are particular research spaces always inherently vulnerable. Rather, my researcher vulnerabilities also shifted within and through times and spaces; difficult to pin down and always on the move. As Downey et al. (2007) suggest, researchers are '. . .susceptible to changing positions of vulnerability throughout the research process' (p. 735). This follows the idea of contextual vulnerability (Clark, 2021), which indicates how vulnerable is not a fixed category into which a researcher might be boxed; but rather fluctuates as affects, emotions, atmospheres, power dynamics, and feelings of belonging oscillate (Jafari et al., 2013; Raheim et al., 2016).

As well as my vulnerabilities shifting over time during interviews with tattoo consumers, depending on how the discussion and our emotions unfolded, such fluctuations were particularly evident during fieldwork. There were some fieldwork sites in which I typically felt less comfortable, owing to differing power dynamics and positionalities, sensory features and felt atmospheres. Indeed, spaces can possess an ambient power eliciting feelings of exclusion (Steadman & de Jong, 2022) for those who do not comfortably 'fold into' that space and its attendant atmospheres (Kuruoğlu & Woodward, 2021). As I observed, 'I have felt a constant oscillation between feelings of belonging or not belonging depending on the research site I was visiting . . .' (*research diary*). However, the sense of unease which can accompany perceptions of not belonging (May, 2011) is an emotion typically concealed in academia (Horton, 2020a). Feelings of not belonging were particularly prevalent within tattooing spaces which, as mentioned earlier, sometimes led to tactics of impression management (Mamali, 2019) to feel more comfortable and confident, whether through strategically curated outfits or making 'verbal assertions' (S. Wilkinson, 2019); such as when '. . .I found myself mentioning to everyone I spoke to about having a tattoo myself, I guess to try and show that I was also part of their world' (*research diary*). This echoes how researchers sometimes disclose personal information during processes of 'display work' to build rapport with participants (Khanijou & Pirani, 2021).

However, belonging is a dynamic construct which can fluctuate in light of changing relational and material contexts (May, 2011). I therefore felt a greater sense of belonging – and less emotionally vulnerable – within museum and art fieldwork sites than tattooing spaces. As Kuruoğlu and Woodward (2021) explain, 'spaces take the shape of the bodies that inhabit them' (p. 114), and I thus felt I was better able to 'fold into' such sites given my past experiences in similar environments and my academic identity. Practices of impression management were therefore not required to feel 'in place' when attending the exhibition about tattooing and time at Somerset House, nor to suppress any vulnerabilities:

> As I finally arrive at Somerset House on a cold, grey, and rainy Saturday afternoon in London, I realise that, unlike prior to attending a tattoo convention, I was feeling quite excited rather than nervous; and I also hadn't meticulously planned what I would wear beforehand to try and communicate a particular identity to others (*fieldnotes*).

A notable distinction also emerged between the two death-related exhibitions I visited. As already revealed, I was sometimes moved to tears as I reflected on those I had lost at the death exhibition in Bristol, owing to the 'atmospheric conditioning' (Kuruoğlu & Woodward, 2021, p. 114) of this space producing reflective and sombre atmospheres. Yet, at BODY WORLDS, in which 'plastinated' and skinned human corpses are displayed artistically to educate visitors about the ordinarily hidden inner workings of the body, I typically felt a greater sense of emotional detachment from what I was encountering. This led to a more heightened sense of emotional vulnerability at the death exhibition.

However, consumption environments comprise different micro-spaces producing contrasting affective tonalities (Steadman & de Jong, 2022), which elicited differing embodied emotions. For instance, whilst I was often emotionally-detached from the skinned corpses and organs on display at BODY WORLDS, the exhibition was housed over seven floors – each focusing on a different aspect of the human body, from the brain to reproductive organs. Hence, I oscillated 'between anxiety and intrigue; detachment and disgust; excitement and sadness' (*fieldnotes*), as I moved through the exhibition. I felt especially uneasy on the floor containing upsetting displays of human embryos, and when confronting corpses exhibiting features more typically associated with living bodies. How we 'land' in affective atmospheres is relational and hence ' . . .shaped by what comes before and in turn, shapes what comes after' (Preece et al., 2022, p. 376). My past challenges with losing family members, as previously revealed, thus intensified my feelings of emotional vulnerability when confronted with more explicitly recognised reminders of human mortality in some areas of this site:

> . . .I am feeling quite apathetic about the exhibition so far. It is just too difficult to register these parts as being inside of me and once a part of a living human being. As I am reading about the brain in one of the cabinets, with the cool air conditioning caressing my skin, I am shocked as I look ahead of me and see a human head and shoulders cut in half, exposing its insides and I am drawn towards it . . . I notice how lifelike it looks and begin to feel quite uneasy and anxious. I spend a few minutes closely studying his face, noticing that he has expression lines and wrinkles, eyelashes and eyebrows, and hairs sprouting from his head and shoulders . . . (*fieldnotes*).

In addition to fluctuating across fieldwork (micro)spaces, my emotions within a single site also shifted over time, as goings-on, social interactions, and atmospheres unfolded in

different ways, given atmospheres can morph over time (Steadman & de Jong, 2022). My growing familiarity with places like tattoo studios, and the tattoo artists working within them, meant as the project progressed, I generally felt less vulnerable in the lead up to and during this fieldwork. This reflects how the atmospheres of unfamiliar environments can be disorientating, in turn arousing vulnerable affects; yet, as our bodies 'reorientate' to a setting over time, we can feel less vulnerable and more like an 'insider' (Preece et al., 2022).

On one particularly memorable occasion, I visited a tattoo studio for the first time to chat to a tattoo artist contact about my research. However, it soon became clear this visit would not run as expected, as some of his clients began intermittently entering the studio for unexpected interviews with me, leading to a highly chaotic and stressful atmosphere. This experience chimed with Butler-Rees and Robinson's (2020) suggestion that doctoral research is '…often fraught with unexpected twists and turns' (p. 2), with the lack of control this can bring linked to experiences of vulnerability (Hoffmaster, 2006). Yet researchers are expected to carefully plan their methodologies, with things not going to plan often associated with a sense of research failure (Cohen-Miller et al., 2020):

> I was originally going along to the studio to meet the tattoo artist, see what goes on at his studio, and to maybe look at some of his past work … However, the tattoo artist had arranged for some of his clients to come in to chat to me in 20-minute intervals, which I wasn't prepared for at all and he never told me about beforehand! It was all a bit chaotic … I didn't know how many people were coming in to chat to me, so half way through chatting to one consumer another would sometimes turn up and be waiting to chat to me, meaning that I had to also rush through the interviews a bit to ensure that somebody wasn't left waiting for too long … (*research diary*).

Yet, later on that same visit, once my (unexpected) interviewees had left, the tattoo artist and I chatted to an excited couple who were in the process of planning the husband's future tattoos. Then 'I instantly felt more at ease', since 'the atmosphere seemed to shift from being rather hectic and stressful, to very exciting' (*fieldnotes*). Likewise, on my return visit, 'I felt much less nervous and as a result I was much less concerned with trying to create some sort of rock/punky image with my clothing' (*fieldnotes*), which reduced any prior vulnerabilities.

In summary, researcher vulnerabilities are not usually fixed or static but can fluctuate through times and spaces, including through contrasting fieldwork spaces. Such (micro) spaces should arguably be considered when planning a project; indeed, some of these spaces might provide a comforting sense of respite for a researcher, akin to the 'backstage regions' of Scott et al.'s (2012) art gallery fieldwork site. My experiences also illustrate how it is important to take time to build connections with people and places during research, as feeling a lack of belonging can elicit researcher vulnerabilities, which can be more likely when adopting short-term participant observation (Brockmann, 2011), as I did in this project.

Conclusions: celebrating researcher vulnerability

Whilst there is nascent researcher vulnerability literature, limited attention has been given to the role memories and anticipations play in eliciting researcher vulnerabilities, and

vulnerable accounts can still feel challenging to write. As Hoffmaster (2006) observes, 'vulnerability gives us much to fear, and we respond to it as we do to other fears: we try to supress and ignore it' (p. 42). In this paper, I sought to overcome the impulse to suppress and ignore, and instead offer an honest autoethnographic tale of my encounters with researcher vulnerability during research into tattoos, time, and death. Through narrating around three themes - *Remembering vulnerabilities*, *(Un)anticipating vulnerabilities*, and *Fluctuating vulnerabilities* - I make two key contributions to marketing and consumer research.

First, existing literature typically focuses on how researcher vulnerability manifests during present-day fieldwork. In contrast, little is known about how memories and anticipations might arouse researcher vulnerabilities. I therefore contribute a more extended theorisation of researcher vulnerability by illustrating how my vulnerabilities were stirred by upsetting memories of challenging life events in both my own and participants' lives; in addition to anxieties over anticipated – or unimaginable – futures, such as worrying about becoming upset during interviews or how vulnerable academic writing may be perceived. This challenges the typical representation of research in methods textbooks as a neat, linear and bounded process, thus helping to better prepare researchers by openly showing how such puncturing of memories and anticipations may stimulate their own vulnerabilities.

For example, this conceptualisation signals the need for a 'shared emotional space' (Butler-Rees & Robinson, 2020) to be put in place before data collection even begins and to endure beyond the data collection period; where researchers have a supportive network they feel comfortable enough to share any anticipatory anxieties with, or emotional responses from difficult memories being stirred. This is not only important for researchers involved in 'sensitive research' (Bluvstein et al., 2021) or research with 'vulnerable' participants (Jafari et al., 2013), as has previously been highlighted, but also since painful memories can surprisingly rise to the surface to elicit vulnerability, whether focusing on sensitive or vulnerable topics or not.

Through demonstrating how researcher vulnerabilities can oscillate through times and spaces, I also provide insights into how more comforting research atmospheres could be sought to ease any feelings of researcher vulnerability. For instance, since we can initially 'crash land' into the atmospheres of unfamiliar settings which can provoke vulnerable affects (Preece et al., 2022), this indicates the potential merit in researchers building familiarity with fieldwork sites over time to enhance feelings of belonging. Alternatively, researchers might carve out fieldwork micro-spaces (Steadman & de Jong, 2022) with more comforting atmospheres (e.g. backstage areas) to regroup if any awkward encounters eliciting vulnerabilities arise. Whilst not the focus of this paper, such relations between researcher vulnerability and the atmospheres of fieldwork spaces could thus provide fertile ground for future research.

Second, this paper helps to move beyond the 'vulnerability as failure' framing in academic culture by calling for a greater celebration of being open about researcher vulnerabilities. We are apparently witnessing a 'vulnerable turn' outside of academia, as reflected in Brené Brown's celebrated Ted Talk on the *Power of Vulnerability*, memoirs like Elizabeth Wurtzel's *Prozac Nation*, and organisations such as the *School of Life*. Accordingly, Chua (2022) recognises how 'successful failure'– learning and growing from failures – is now becoming a marketplace commodity, as seen in the emergent

global phenomenon of 'Fuckup Nights', where work-based failures are shared amongst professionals, in addition to other marketised 'solutions' to vulnerabilities, such as self-help books and courses to 'unleash the power' of vulnerability.

Within academia, ideas such as 'slow scholarship' (Saville, 2021) and more 'humble' (Saville, 2021) and 'gentle' (Horton, 2020a) academic research are coming to the fore, which encourages researchers to be more transparent about their shortcomings and any awkward and uncomfortable emotions arising during research. Meanwhile, more vulnerable academic writing is being embraced by a slowly growing number of researchers (e.g. Kiriakos & Tienari, 2018; Prothero, 2017; Sparkes, 1996). Yet, it seems this vulnerable turn has not yet been fully embraced within academia, with literature on researcher vulnerability still emergent.

In some cases, researcher vulnerability can lead to more negative cases of failure. Indeed, Horton (2020b) challenges the 'triumph over adversity' framing of academic failure, by encouraging greater recognition of '. . .failures with no happy endings; of failures which just go nowhere; of situations where there is just no good news or redemptive story . . .' (p. 5). For instance, emotional vulnerability can result in academic burn-out (Micanovic et al., 2020), which can throw project completion and future career progression into jeopardy, not least risking the health of the researcher. Whilst broader issues around the vulnerability many researchers face in the increasingly competitive and precarious academic job market can result in failing to achieve a secure academic position (Butler-Rees & Robinson, 2020) and being subjected to the uncertainty of short-term contracts.

However, I hope this paper helps to promote a greater celebration of how being honest about researcher vulnerability can also bring some important positives. It is increasingly recognised that emotions and embodiment are intimately entangled with – and can enhance – knowledge-production (e.g. emerald & Carpenter, 2015; Jafari et al., 2013; Meriläinen et al., 2021). As Fraser and Puwar (2008) contend, 'sensory, emotional and affective relations are central to the ways in which researchers engage with, produce, understand and translate what becomes "research"' (p. 2), as well as fostering greater intimacy between researchers, participants, and academic peers to help reduce feelings of isolation (Butler-Rees & Robinson, 2020). For example, through leaning into my own vulnerabilities, I was able to better tune into the emotional worlds of my participants, such as how their tattoos reflected life's disruptions, including break-ups, deaths, and emotional breakdowns, helped them to assemble a sense of order out of life's disorder and create embodied legacies for lost loved ones.

On a final note, during the writing of this article, I have experienced waves of anxiety about how much to reveal to others, how readers of this paper might perceive me, and whether my professionalism and competence will be questioned. This echoes Harrowell et al.'s (2018) admission of how, when writing about their personal experiences of research failure, they 'were stalked with worry about the impact of writing about failure on our own careers' (p. 236). I have, therefore, had to coax myself into gradually taking away some of my theoretical armour (Sparkes, 1996) in earlier drafts, to allow more space for my vulnerable writing to emerge. I hope this paper can, alongside the accounts written by others who have already bravely offered tales of researcher vulnerability, contribute to a more open, honest, and vulnerable academic culture in marketing and consumer

research, so that the next person who writes such a paper might not feel quite so anxious about hitting the journal submit button.

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