European Journal for
**Qualitative Research
in Psychotherapy**
www.EJQRP.org

European Association
for Integrative Psychotherapy

Dissertation to published article:
A journey from shame to sharing

Alan S. McPherson

Integrative Psychotherapist in private practice, Leicester, UK   *Email*: research@talkingspace.co.uk

Abstract: This paper describes my experiences of re-presenting my research from a master's degree in Integrative Psychotherapy into a paper suitable for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. Bringing together two different approaches in qualitative research: autoethnography and reflexivity, I reflect on my personal journey of creating an article for publication and becoming a researcher-practitioner. I offer two 'voices' represented by the literary device of different fonts: the first offers a more factual, neutral, information-giving account; the second is more subjective where I expose my emotional responses at the time and now. This paper highlights the wider challenges and personal obstacles of becoming published within the field of counselling and psychotherapy. My hope is that it will inspire other graduates to consider taking the final step to re-present their research from their degrees and share their participant's stories within the counselling and psychotherapy community, and beyond.

Keywords: Academic writing, becoming published, autoethnography, integrative psychotherapy, self-disclosure fiction

My story of getting published and becoming a researcher-practitioner began in 2017 during the third year of my master's degree in Integrative Psychotherapy. I had noticed the shelves in the resource room at my training institute were bulging with a multitude of dissertations patiently waiting to share their stories with eager students. Shocked at the hundreds of hours of effort not shared beyond those four walls, I was determined that my dissertation would not join these forlorn ranks. I knew if I were successful in passing the degree, I would put my energies into producing that first published article. Upon graduating, I was faced with having to follow through and 'put my money where my mouth was', given that I had spoken with tutors and peers about my intentions. As I glimpsed the enormity of the task in front of me, I began to wonder what I had let myself in for. I soon recognised that this was not going to be just a rewrite, this was a whole new project.

In my original research using a research methodology of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2016), I drew together the strands of 1) self-disclosure as a therapeutic intervention; 2) the internet as a growing source of freely accessible personal information; and 3) the debate over whether the disclosure of sexual orientation by the counsellor or psychotherapist is relevant to the therapeutic process. I had something I wanted to share with the wider therapeutic community: my experiences of these threads as I had woven them together. Despite the complexities of what I was researching, and with some experiences being difficult to talk about (Riessman, 2008), I did not want the gift of the stories of my participants to be banished from awareness by being locked away on the selves of my training institute. To do so, I felt, would reinforce the feelings of shame they had bravely faced through their sharing of their experiences. I did not anticipate how much the

process of writing the article would trigger my shame in being seen. The fear of the judgement from others on my findings, my experiences, dovetailed with my shame of being gay.

I understand research and publication as an ongoing dialogue between different practitioners sharing their clinical experiences. This is a conversation I wanted to become part of and it is something I knew I could do. As a therapist, I certainly know how to talk and how to listen. I also believe engagement with research as a fundamental part of my practice as a counsellor and psychotherapist. This is particularly heartfelt for me, as much learning from our individual therapeutic practices "remains unpublished and the lessons learned unshared with others" (Dixon, 2001, p.417), as Dixon found in her article for healthcare professionals writing for publication. This mirrored my observations at my training institute. Given the focus of the recent publications by the research team at the Metanoia Institute (for example, see Bager-Charleson et al., 2020, in this volume), I recognise the tendency towards an academic-practitioner divide and the challenge of getting published.

Moving Towards Writing My Story

In my original master's research, I explored the experiences of four psychotherapists who had chosen not to disclose their sexual orientation to clients and the impact on the therapeutic relationship when they were subsequently found out (client-initiated disclosure) (McPherson, 2020). Client‐initiated disclosure (Zur, 2008) is a form of therapist self‐disclosure which is a consequence of a client's deliberate actions to satisfy their curiosities about the personal life of their therapist.

I am proud of myself, and for my participants, that I was successful in having my article about this research published in Counselling and Psychotherapy Research (the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy's – BACP – research journal) in 2020.

One of my messages in the thesis was to invite practitioners to have all the bits of themselves sitting upright. "Sitting upright is not being ashamed of parts of self. It is being strong, confident and proud of those parts." (McPherson, 2020, p.376). In re-presenting the stories within my research, I was engaging in an activity of 'sitting upright'. It was not an easy and straightforward process: my fear of being seen pushed me back into hiding and shame. If it were easy, I believe more graduates would move towards publishing their research.

By taking the step to write this article about my writing process, I hope to inspire others to keep going after graduation to publication. Whilst painful at times, I believe it is a rewarding, growthful process. It has also helped me to strengthen my self-belief and my confidence in engaging in researching as part of my therapeutic practice.

What follows is my story of how I navigated the humps and bumps of shame, stuck-ness and fear that often paralyses researcher-practitioners from seeing dissertations through the final stage into publication.

The aim for this article is to be informative but not to educate you on how to write for publication. There are dozens of articles, books and blogs already covering this subject and I will refer to those which helped me at the time or those that have subsequently become known to me which would have been helpful. My aim, instead, is to share my challenges, difficulties, frustrations, and struggles, in the hope that it demystifies the process and normalises your own experiences in your re-write.

My story comes in four stages: 1) Preparing for the journey; 2) Re-presenting my research; 3) Entering into the dialogue; and 4) Being seen 'out' in the world. For each stage, I give suggestions about what that stage involves and describe the process I undertook, sharing resources and tips which helped me through that stage. I compliment this with an account of my subjective experience, thoughts, and feelings of being in the process, the obstacles I faced, and how I overcame my repeated desire to just give up. To differentiate between these two 'voices', I use a literary device of different fonts. The first offers a more factual, neutral, information-giving account of the process; the second (*indented and in purple*) is more subjective and is where I share my emotional responses, both at the time and now.

I write this article bringing together two different approaches in qualitative research: autoethnography and reflexivity. Through employing **autoethnography**, I bring an academic method to the construction of this article, where I share my experiences with researcher-practitioners, particularly those who would like to start their writing journey. Autoethnography is both a research method and a writing approach which focuses on personal experiences (auto) to illicit the cultural, political, or social (ethno) through systematic analysis (graphy) (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015). This approach challenges more traditional approaches to research, treating it as a political, moral, and socially conscious action (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008). Drawing on the principles of autobiography and ethnography, the researcher is both doing and writing autoethnography. As such, this research approach is both the process and the product.

Using personal notes from my research journal, I embrace my vulnerability as I expose my feelings, reactions, and parts of my life story (Squire, 2017) within this process. I offer this **reflexivity** in the hope that we can grow together: me from writing this article and you from reading it. My research journal had been created originally as a personal document, written to facilitate reflexivity and promote transparency, confirmability and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of my previous research and I have extended its remit to this current article.

Three themes emerged from the stories of my participants in my original research. These themes were: Knowing ourselves; Revealing ourselves; and an External perspective (McPherson, 2020). These themes described the relationship the participants have with their identified sexual orientation, their experiences of this knowledge emerging within their therapeutic spaces, and the ongoing consequences of this knowledge being out. Interestingly, I notice these themes emerging again as I write this article and I can see now that "for a professional writer there are no private writings" (Bloom, 1996, p.24). My fears can be found lurking in the shadows of these sentences and paragraphs, slowly illuminated through writing this and potential future articles. Whilst inside me, I feel confident in who I am and what I am writing about. As this emerges on the paper my fears start to creep out, obscuring parts of me less confident when spoken about. There is some shame in both the exposure and being an object.

> My instinct is to hide behind the words of others, so excruciating has the pain of exposure been to me in the past. The voices of my archaic introjects whispering inside me their epitaphs of 'there is something wrong with you' and 'who do you think you are'. In my research, my participants described their feelings of vulnerability and exposure as their sexual orientation emerged in their therapy rooms "mirror[ing] aspects of their experience of coming out" (McPherson, 2020, p.375). In the revision feedback to this article, I felt the [same] sickness well up inside me as the reviewers invited me to be "even more personal". My desire to run away and hide surfaced again. Am I ready to come out yet again and face my fears of judgement and rejection?

I concluded my research dissertation with a plea to other practitioners, encouraging them to know "what it is within themselves that frightens them, or they fear being revealed" (McPherson, 2020, p.376). By writing this particular article, I am claiming ownership of this fear of standing out from the crowd, confronting those inner voices that believe this contribution is worthless. This undertaking has value, it is not worthless. Whilst this article is fundamentally a single narrative, it is underpinned by my philosophical belief in the human experience as being a complex paradigm of personal and relational experiences (Etherington, 2004). As I write about my story from my perspective now, I am "mak[ing] sense of [my] experience, and communicate [my] experience to others, in the form of stories" (McLeod, 2011, p.187); stories that consist of multiple realities, shaped by the cultural, political and social spheres of my life.

> I am a working-class gay man who grew up in the 1970s and 1980s and was educated at a comprehensive school in a colliery village in the East Midlands. I am nothing special and I am different. My formative years were accented by memories of Thatcher and the miner's strikes, poverty and redundancy, and queer-bashing that came with the HIV plague. My inner teenager is often amazed I escaped the whirlpool of deprivation and poverty I was circling in. Little has changed in the last twenty years as I am saddened to read my district within the East Midlands remains the worst place in England to grow up poor (Burns & Campbell, 2017). I had a lucky escape and each invitation to be 'seen' reminds me to look again at that which I thought I had escaped from, still alive within me.

In the writing of my experiences, I am asking myself the question, "How can I best help and encourage others to do what I have done?". I am also writing this article for myself, informing my inner teenager that my cultural, political, and social origins have shaped me, but they do not define me. I hope the power of my story (Plummer, 2019) offers this message to others that might doubt their contributions. I also hope this story might also go a little way towards diminishing the gap between practitioner and academic highlighted by McBeath, Bager-Charleson, and Abarbanel (2019) - the reason why so few go on to publish their research findings. I believe there is a researcher inside all of us, we just need a little courage to speak out with pride. I want to read your stories too.

My Ethics in Sharing this Story

"Writing about the self always involves writing about others" (Adams, 2006, p.720), as stories do not exist in pure isolation (Riessman, 2008). This article would not have existed were it not for the generosity of my four research participants. To not acknowledge and welcome their presence as I write this article would be remiss of me (Clandinin, Caine, & Lessard, 2018). I draw on Ellis's description (2007) of a relational ethical

position where researchers "act from our hearts and minds, acknowledge our interpersonal bonds to others, and take responsibility for actions and their consequences" (Ellis, 2007, p.3). Whilst this article is my story, I stalwartly acknowledge my story has changed and grown through my relationship with these participants and their generosity in sharing their stories. Then, as I share it with you, my story shifts again.

Mindful of the need for me to give my own informed consent for sharing this story, at this point in writing the article I am giving my consent knowing that I "do not know how others will respond to and/or interpret [my] work… [I] can never definitively know who we harm or help with our communicative practices" (Adams, 2008, p.179). With this in mind, I continue writing, knowing that "writing difficult stories is a gift to self, a reflexive attempt to construct meaning in our lives and heal or grow from our pain" (Ellis, 2007, p.26). I consider Tillman-Healy's idea of friendship as a method of research (Tillman-Healy, 2003), and in writing about myself and sharing my stories, I do so as my own friend. As I discovered in my research, "In knowing ourselves, I know the risks of revealing myself are the same risks I ask clients to engage with when they sit with me…as [I] come into contact with parts of self [I] fear or are ashamed of" (McPherson, 2020, p.375). Writing this article, I bring another layer of salve to those feared and shamed parts within me.

Preparing for the Journey

I have found with most journeys that preparation is the key to success. This initial stage brought to the fore numerous ethical decisions including: the rationale for moving towards publication, ensuring informed consent from participants, adherence to data protection guidelines, identifying the time for writing and availability of support networks, as well as starting to consider the most approach journal to approach for publication.

The rationale for publishing a research dissertation is an important consideration, as ethical decisions, consequential implications, and unconscious desires cannot be rushed through (Murray, 2020). With counselling or psychotherapy student research dissertations, the audience is often small and of interest only to other therapists. The access to my dissertation was very much in the control of my training institute. With a published article, it is available to a wider field - potentially anyone. There is also the consideration of whether I wished to be professionally known as an 'expert' in this field of research (Woods, 2005).

I found the responsibility of the implications for moving towards publication laid heavily with me. Whilst the identity of my participants remained protected, mine does not. By publishing my research, I was choosing to reveal my sexual orientation to every reader of the article. I wrestled with myself for weeks, wanting to be proud of myself and my achievements, but with the sentiment being drowned out by the inner voice screaming 'NO'. the instinct to run away ever-present within me. I questioned whether I wished to be known as the 'expert' in this field, mirroring the sentiments on one of my participants, in that I am not at expert in being gay (McPherson, 2020, p.373). At times, I feel as though I am not even an expert in knowing myself.

Obtaining informed consent from your participants to publish your research is an ongoing commitment to ethical practice (BACP, 2019). Whilst your participants may have granted consent for the dissertation or thesis, they may not for publication, unless you have specifically asked for this in the informed consent form. Without this consent, their data will need to be removed from the research before proceeding towards publication. The ethical position regarding becoming published needs careful consideration through reviewing ethical guidelines for research when formulating your rationale. For example, the BACP's ethical guidelines for research in the counselling professions (BACP, 2019), or the code of ethics of the UKCP College of which you are a member. If you have chosen a journal already, their publisher may indicate which ethical framework they adhere to, and this may offer some ethical guidance. Careful consideration of the ethical position contributes to the trustworthiness of your research (McLeod, 2011).

Luckily, I had included this consideration in my original informed consent form for participants. Even though I had their original agreement, I chose to return to my participants after submitting my dissertation to check whether they still consented to me attempting publication. I was pleased when all four of my participants said yes and granted their consent for me to continue. I noticed my cautiousness in returning for their consent, worried they would say no. A small part of me wondered about just going ahead without asking for their permission to soothe my anxiety, but I knew this would be wrong. I felt so alone with these big decisions. The weight of the responsibility to get it right resting on my shoulders and I had no one to share it with.

With the informed consent form, timescales are usually set for the destroying of data in line with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (GDPR.eu, 2020). It is important to consider whether these timescales have been set with sufficient longevity to facilitate the re-presenting of your research for publication, for example, will you need access to the raw interview data. If so, then it is worth considering whether these timescales need extending through re-contracting with your participants. Alternatively, participants need to be clear that their words may need to be available to be used subsequently in future research.

> At the time of my dissertation submission, I was still covered by the previous guidelines, the Data Protection Act (1998) which were less stringent than the current legislation. I destroyed the raw audio recordings in line with my participant informed consent forms. Even though it was the right thing to do, deleting those files was hard. My anxiety ever-present, asking me: What if I had missed something? What if I had to prove something about what I had written?

Without academic submission deadlines, alongside the rationale for moving towards publication, there also needs to be the personal drive and motivation to overcome procrastination. Given life and work commitments, both time and energy are needed to undertake this complex task (which for most therapists in private practice will be unpaid). Supportive, encouraging family members and an identified professional support network in place will help to keep focus on the task. Researching-writing is a long journey, likely to take many months or years, depending on the nature of the research. Involvement of an academic mentor or research supervisor knowledgeable of your subject area or research method may help to lift the writing to the level required of a peer-reviewed journal, as well as providing professional guidance and support.

> I know my procrastination process well. There is always some paperwork to file or a toilet to clean when I have something difficult to do. Standing out from the crowd feels really risky when I am at the edge of my certainty (Murray, 2020). From my frightened place, I ask myself why ever would I consciously invite criticism? I found my answer in the words of Mick Cooper's blog publishing your research: some pointers, because "you owe it to your participants" (2019). When I think of my participants, I feel my admiration of their bravery and generosity. They are the reason I face my fear and carry on writing.

Whilst the final decision for which journal to approach for publication does not need to be made at this stage, part of the formation of the rationale for moving to publication could include consideration of which research conversation you may wish to enter. This may be subject-specific, research method specific, or a more generic counselling and psychotherapy journal.

You may have in mind a specific journal you are targeting. The choice of journal may also be made by considering their impact factor. This factor is a measure of the reach of the research within the journal. The higher the impact factor, the farther the reach and therefore the greater the audience, but often the more difficult it is to get published in that journal. In general, counselling and psychotherapy journals have a very low impact factor or none at all. I found the Impact Factor Search Engine website (Resurchify, 2020) a simple way of identifying a journal's impact factor.

> I was clear at the start of my journey that I ideally wanted to be published in a generic counselling and psychotherapy journal. I chose the BACP research journal as my preferred choice. This decision was formed in part by my perception of the BACP being encouraging and supportive towards new practitioner-researchers like me. With an impact factor of 0.50 (Resurchify, 2020), this seemed a safe level of presence at this stage in my research career. The BACP had recently moved their research journal to online-only, and I felt relieved I could hide behind my perception of this reduction in their visibility.

Re-presenting my Research

Having taken the decision to labour towards publication, with everything in place to start the process, then the writing of the research article can commence. This stage is particularly concerned with contemplating the re-presentation of aspects of your dissertation or thesis, and the process of writing the first draft. The points considered in this two-part stage are the feelings of shame and motivation to write and engaging with the mechanics of the draft article structure including taking account of referencing and word count, the change in audience, and supervision.

a) Contemplating the writing of an article

Reflecting on John McLeod's words of qualitative research being an ongoing process (McLeod, 2011), the writing of an article is not (or should not be) a re-hash of the dissertation. The writing of your article is a reflection of where the research is now, incorporating those new insights which have arisen after the final word had been committed to the dissertation. This stage represents an opportunity to revisit the original findings, discussions and conclusions, to see what has changed or evolved. Perhaps there has been feedback from your participants, supervisor or peers, or the dissertation or thesis marking feedback identified omissions or additional areas for inclusion.

> Whilst I hoped to enjoy this stage, embracing the opportunities to showcase my research and myself as a practitioner (Bondi & Fewell, 2016), I felt the shame rising [once more] within me as I sat in front of the computer staring at the blank screen. I heard myself say; I should know what to write, what's wrong with me, I don't know what to do? I felt useless again: stuck and stupid. My shame blinded me from seeing the messages I wanted to share as I became overwhelmed with the size of the task. I took a deep breath and watched on YouTube Keala Settle face her shame in being seen when singing 'This is Me' from *The Greatest Showman* (Settle, 2017). As my tears roll down my face, I told myself, I can do this.

The draft article does not need to be a re-presentation of the whole source dissertation, which may contain multiple stories, messages or conclusions. The draft article need not be a distillation nor summary of the whole dissertation, nor a report of a report, but rather an opportunity to construct something new. Feedback from participants, peers or the marking sheets may help expand and clarify arguments and research findings. As Linda Finlay writes, "start by working out what you want to say" (Finlay, 2020, p.29). What is it you want to say and why do you want to share these messages?

> When I reflect on what my messages were from my research and what I was communicating in the article, it came simply as: however hard I try and hide those parts of me I am ashamed of, clients will find out. Be ready for these parts to be revealed by embracing them. I am ashamed of being gay. This shame lessens with each gut-retching, terrifying encounter with self-disclosure. I share my message for others to know they are not alone. Strength comes from knowing I am not alone with my shame.

b) Writing the first draft

Having decided on the what and the why of the draft article's message, the writing of the first draft can begin. In general, most published research articles follow a similar layout, which often reflects the research method used (Murray, 2020). If you have already identified a preferred journal, then the structure of your article can be gleaned from other published articles in this journal which cover a similar subject or facilitate a similar research method. Otherwise, the American Psychological Association's (APA) publication manual (APA, 2009) offers a solid foundation for the structure of a research article. It is worth noting the APA is currently transitioning from their sixth edition (APA, 2009) to the seventh edition (APA, 2020a) of their publication manual, and they have produced a really useful document describing the edition changes (APA, 2020b).

> The BACP's *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* journal Author Guidelines (Wiley, 2020) provided me with clarity of their expectations on the research article structure, as did this journal, *European Journal for Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy* (EJQPR) (2020) which I drew upon whilst writing this article. I found the journal's editor in both cases a great resource to check out how I was writing, and whether it was in line with their expectations. To feel the editor was on my side was a great comfort, reducing my shame in not knowing what I was doing.

Author guidelines generally indicate the referencing style and the maximum wordcount for their journal (if one exists) and anything specific or unique they expect from a submission. Perhaps one of the biggest challenges of transforming a dissertation or thesis into an article will be a likely reduction in word count needed. For a bachelor's or master's dissertation, shaving off a couple of thousand words is manageable, whereas condensing a doctoral dissertation of 50,000 or 100,000 words is a feat in itself, even when considering the dissertation could be split across multiple articles. For those journals without a specified word count, the challenge of writing the first draft lies across a spectrum from too succinct to too vague.

> I found shaving off 3000 words my thesis particularly challenging. My anxiety was flying high as my inner critic wrestled me into endless loops of worry of the impact of misrepresentation of my participants. Practically every word in my research dissertation had been carefully

considered and to remove it felt like a loss of something of the participants and myself. Secondly, my chosen research method, narrative inquiry, in its representation of experiences through stories, raised within me ethical dilemmas as I took my scissors to my participants and my own story. Am I still conveying the story as it was intended if I have edited it to fit within an arbitrary word count?

One aspect which can help meet a journal's required wordcount is the change in the intended audience from a primarily academic piece of writing designed to demonstrate competency, to something more clinical, collaborative, and informative. The target audience for a dissertation or thesis is often tutors who are assessing the student's competency in a particular subject area, grading the assignment accordingly. This may include demonstrating academic rigour through source texts or illustration of knowledge and understanding in therapeutic research ability. For a research article in a journal, I believe a level of therapeutic mastery can be assumed of the readers, (depending on the target readership for that journal) and so explanations and references added to demonstrate therapeutic competencies can be removed.

I felt a sense of relief in demonstrating my competency in undertaking research in counselling and psychotherapy, through the successful passing of my research dissertation. As such, a lot of the references were no longer required as I did not need to indicate the source texts for my therapy theories, terms and concepts. I was left with a greater dilemma of which source texts were particularly relevant to my research. I found comfort in the narrative inquiry's relational ethic of "moving slowly" (Clandinin, Caine & Lessard, 2018, p.11), taking time to reflect on how the sense of each section of my article felt. I also knew I would need to take the plunge at some point, as my anxious part enjoyed the reflective time, using it to both wonder and worry in equal measure. I faced my fears in being seen and asked my closest colleagues to review my first draft, to help me see what worked and what did not work in what I had written. After further editing, I shared this draft with my research participants, to gain their consent before approaching my chosen journal. Whilst I was technically now ready, I felt very unready for the next stage.

Entering into the Dialogue

With the first draft article ready, now is the time to put yourself forward to enter into the dialogue. Much of this stage is in the hands of your chosen journal and as such this stage mainly draws on your patience and resilience. The points considered cover the process of submission to a journal, receiving and working with feedback, as well as starting to develop your identity as a practitioner-researcher.

If you have not already, now is the time to choose the journal to which you wish to submit. In choosing which journal to approach, I have found JournalTOCs useful in identifying potential candidates, see http://www.journaltocs.ac.uk/. This is also a good time to start to establish your presence as a practitioner-researcher in preparation for the submitting of your draft article. I would encourage you to sign up for an Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORCiD) at https://orcid.org/. This is a unique digital identifier, growing in presence and usage across the research communities.

I felt excited by the process of starting to form an identity as a practitioner-researcher. Successfully creating an ORCiD felt like I had come into being in that moment. I had a number which would remain with me for the rest of my research career. I had an identity, reminding me of that feeling I had when my National Insurance (NI) number was first issued at 16. I had 'come of age'.

For most journals, the submission process is online. Computer skills are therefore needed for this stage, to register for an author's account to be able to submit the draft article to your chosen journal. As mentioned in the previous stage, the journal's author's guidelines will indicate what is expected from your submission, and I recommend you review these before submission. I would also encourage you to check your spelling, grammar and punctuation prior to submission. It is advisable to submit to one journal at a time, rather than to multiple journals, as it is unethical and will create problems further down the line if both journals accept your submission.

After six months I finally had my first draft article ready to submit. Following the guidelines for the BACP, I uploaded the anonymised draft and cover letter. I

noticed myself hesitate before clicking submit, unsure if I was ready to be seen in this way. I took a deep breath and drew in on myself. Sitting with my fear of being seen, I brought to mind memories of being accepted into the gay community. The feeling of coming home to kindred spirits, accepting one another through our shared shame of being different. I had started the process of coming out as a practitioner-researcher and I also started the process of coming out again as gay. I reassured myself it would be different this time, as I clicked submit.

Once the draft article has been submitted in line with the requirements detailed in the author's guidelines, the editor of the journal takes over the process. They will undertake their preliminary checks, for example, checking for suitability of your research article for their journal, that they are accepting this subject area at this time, and that the submission is complete. Any issues, the editor will be in touch with you directly. After your article has passed the preliminary checks, it will be sent off for the initial review. This is usually a blind review, with your identity being anonymised from the reviewers. Between two and four reviewers are usually assigned with one reviewer is likely to be a subject expert and another an expert in your chosen research approach. As the reviewers are usually doing this in a voluntary capacity, patience is a necessary step. The first review may take many weeks to be completed.

I had two reviewers for my original article, one who seemed to be more of a traditional academic and one who seemed to be more subject focused. I did not know who my reviewers were, as much as they did not know who I was. I was also mindful of the possible 'criticism' I could receive. My research was very important to me and also very personal. Whilst I might have gotten an excellent mark for the research dissertation, this did not mean that it has any publishable value. I found the wait for feedback from the review as agonising as waiting for the results for my master's degree, finding myself checking the submission portal weekly in anticipation of the feedback.

Following the initial review, there are at least three likely outcomes.

1) **Rejected**. This is disheartening and you have three choices available, give up, submit your original draft to another journal, or to review any feedback provided by this journal, edit your article, and submit to another journal.

2) **Accept without revision.** This is very unusual and seldom happens, so if you are accepted without revision, well done.

3) **Accept with revision.** The journal has accepted your submission, but revisions are required to bring the draft article to the level they expect. The necessary changes will usually be detailed in the editor's response to you, along with the timescales for your re-submission.

I received an 'accept with revision' and the editor asked for my re-submission to be sent within six months. Whilst elated at the acceptance of my draft article, I was also disheartened about the amount of feedback I had received. I had a lot of changes to consider and a request for further data to be added to the draft article. I asked myself why I was doing this to myself and toyed around with the idea of giving up. To give me more time to work with the feedback, I asked for an extension from the journal's editor, as the period clashed with my busiest time in my clinical work. I felt like I was on a game of snakes and ladders and I had found the giant snake on the board, sliding me right back to the start.

After receiving feedback from the review, whilst you do not have to respond to every point raised or indeed agree with every point, I would encourage a relational response to these professionals who have given their time freely to support your development. The editor will provide guidelines on how to submit the revised article. For each submitted revision, the process from above may repeat. It is likely the same reviewers from before are used, as they now have knowledge of your research. Your changes will be considered, and the draft article reviewed again, with further review comments raised as identified. The editor of the journal will remain in touch throughout the whole process and can be seen as the meditator for this stage.

My reviewers' feedback was hard-hitting. I needed to up my gain if I were to become published. Their feedback included, "I'm not sure that the author understands what an introduction is used for in a research journal", "I believe the author has an important perspective to share" and "[I] wonder if this was a countertransference of the author – just saying this for the author to think about as it came across as a little critical". I took a pragmatic approach to respond relationally to the reviewer's comments respectfully and professionally, ensuring I covered every point raised by the reviewers in my revised draft article cover letter, even when I did not agree with them and had made no changes. When I reflect on what got me through those nine months it took me to make

those revisions, it entailed copious amounts of coffee, a lot of sighing, filing and cleaning, and some motivating words from colleagues. Reminding myself I owed it to my participants pushed me to keep going. I was not going to be put down and silenced by my shame. I want this story to be heard.

Being Seen Out in the World

When you reach this stage, well done. It is a great achievement becoming published and one worthy of feeling pride. This final stage comes in two parts: the first is the forming of an identity as a published researcher and I include some ideas of where I am in this, the second part is much more personal, reflecting my unique story of being published. For me, the story reflects my ongoing tensions of being out in the world and the reduction in my ability to decide to whom I disclose my sexual orientation, adding another interesting perspective to my original research (McPherson, 2020) as I purposely increase the availability of my personal information available on the internet.

a) 'Outing' myself as a published practitioner-researcher

As part of forming an identity and promoting your research, the process is one of talking about it. Disseminating and sharing it with colleagues in study groups and conferences is a good place to start. The BACP holds an annual research conference for networking and dissemination, see their website at https://tinyurl.com/ya59qb9n. Maria Cohut's blog post (2019) provides some tips for supporting ongoing independent research, particularly with regards to drawing on any alumni affiliations. There are online communities for researchers, for example, see ResearchGate at https://www.researchgate.net/, or Academia at https://www.academia.edu/, for connecting with other researchers and sharing information and research. Before sharing your research, it is important to check archiving and copyright situations of the journal you have been published in. I have found the SHERPA/RoMEO website http://sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/index.php lists relevant information. To ensure you do not fall foul of any copyright agreements, the website How Can I Share It? https://www.howcanishareit.com/ uses your article's Digital Object Identifier (DOI), if your article has been given one, and is a great resource for checking what limitations may have been placed on the dissemination of your published article.

I have found becoming a practitioner-researcher a lonely experience. I wonder how did the "tenuous relationship between research and clinical practice [come about] within the psychotherapy profession" (Bager-Charleson, McBeath, & Plock, 2019, p.203)? Whilst historically "psychotherapy practitioners and researchers were the same people" (McBeath, Bager-Charleson, & Abarbanel, 2019, p.104), this arbitrary division continues to be perpetuated with a loss to both researchers and practitioners. I have found myself being drawn to further academic study just so I can connect with other research colleagues. I am mindful that to do so has the potential to further encourage this split.

The impact of COVID-19 has been devastating to many aspects of my ways of working as a therapist, changing the therapeutic frame beyond what I could have previously imagined. I chuckle to myself as I write this as ironically, I am now finding myself overwhelmed by the opportunities that have become available as discussion groups, webinars and workshops have started to appear online, making often London-centred events accessible across the UK.

Whilst limited in the UK, I have found a couple of organisations specifically focused on supporting researchers not directly affiliated with an academic institution. The Forum for Independent Research Endeavours (FIRE-UK) is generic across disciplines and is affiliated to the USA based National Coalition of Independent Scholars with a growing presence in the UK. See https://tinyurl.com/y7h7jvjp for more information and membership details. The UKCP's Practitioner Research Network (PRN) meets quarterly to share ideas and to promote researching amongst practitioners. For more information, see the UKCP website at https://tinyurl.com/yd3pqfoj.

b) Being 'out' in the world

Being published is unique and there is little guidance I can offer beyond my own story. This story is still being written, developing, and growing even as I write these words.

In my original research article (McPherson, 2020), I explored my experiences of the boundary between being gay and out in my personal life and choosing to disclosure this knowledge on a case-by-case basis with clients in my professional life. This boundary served me well, protecting me from my unprocessed shame of being different. When this knowledge became known by a client

through their own means, I came face-to-face with my shame at being gay. These two worlds smashed together, and I was forced to confront this shame. I draw on Coleman's (1981–1982) description of coming out as gay or lesbian, believing his description equally applies to coming out in any form which contributes to identity. In publishing my research, I came out to the world as a psychotherapist, as a practitioner-researcher, and as gay.

In taking ownership of my narrative of my sexual orientation (McPherson, 2020, p.367), I knew it would be time to revisit old wounds. I spoke with my sister regarding sharing my published article with my mum. My sister expressed caution, knowing my history. I was scared. Scared of my mum's response and scared of history repeating itself as I returned to the architect of the introjects. At the same time, I felt stronger and more confident. I am proud of myself and my achievements and it was time to come out to the world with my achievements to those closest to me. With my mum's consent, I share her response:

Wow, I'm impressed and also a little saddened to read some of the stories that have shaped lives in our society. But I'm afraid it is what it is, and no amount of analysis will change it. We are all individuals and as such should be treated as individuals but unfortunately there are still people who want to dictate to others and project their views in an attempt to change the way we think. I'm proud of you and I'm sure your dad would have been too" (personal communication, December 8, 2019).

I can only begin to understand what relief and healing these words brought me. In my research conclusion I wrote, "In fear, I hid this part of myself. This study has helped me to accept my sexual orientation and to dispel the fears of others which I had internalised." (McPherson, 2020, p.376). By becoming published and sharing this achievement with those I hid from, I am starting to embrace this part of me with more love and acceptance.

Acceptance is an ongoing journey though. A client recently said to me that they had found and read my published article. As my stomach dropped, I knew I was scared. I held my breath, steeling myself to how they might response. "I was afraid of my sexual orientation being found out by clients and the damage this knowledge may cause" (McPherson, 2020, p.376). One of those clients I fear I may have damaged was now telling me they knew my secret. To be truthful to my research findings, I knew now was the time to be "strong, confident and proud" (McPherson, 2020, p.376) of being

gay. Exploring the impact on this client, they said that they now felt I would truly understand them. They knew the context was different, but that I had truly experienced what they had experienced.

This embracing continues. A former tutor at my training institute expressed her desire to use my published article as an exemplar illustrating narrative research to her students. My initial reactions contained both delight and dread. I am drawn to Tony Adams' words, in the section on caring for self in undertaking autoethnography (Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis, 2015, p.82-88). "Coming out is a never-ending process, one that changes with each context and every new audience, and an act of disclosure that requires me to repeat the same kind of disclosure again and again." (Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis, 2015, p.85). Being published in the field of sexual orientation and disclosure, I can never fully leave this field, drawn into this repeating act of self-disclosure.

I know now that my being out in the world has contributed to a sense of confidence within me to keep researching and to keep developing my identity as a research-practitioner. It has helped me start to cross the bridge from student to independence as a researcher. It has also help diminish my shame. Whilst I still feel the same response in my stomach when I asked to talk about my research, the sickness is slowly being replaced by pride as those who ask me about it are more interested in the research than my archaic introjects of what it means to be me and gay. Becoming published is helping to heal this shame.

Conclusion

In writing this article, my aim has been to share my learning and experiences of becoming and being published. Using autoethnography to describe my experience, I hope this article inspires other recently qualified practitioners to publish their training research and contribute to the process of narrowing the "researcher-practitioner gap" (McBeath, Bager-Charleson, & Abarbanel, 2019, p.104).

This article is also autobiographical and, in being so, I share something of myself with you. I hope this stance helps you to "live with the situations rather than separate from them... live with showing rather than telling" (Adams, 2006, p.717). I invite you to be proud and share your achievements. I invite you to show me your stories and share your research within our community.

Acknowledgements

References

Adams, T. E. (2006). Seeking father: Relationally reframing a troubled love story. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(4), 704–723. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800406288607

Adams, T. E. (2008). A review of narrative ethics. *Qualitative Inquiry, 14*(2), 175–194. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800407304417

Adams, T. E., & Holman-Jones, S. (2008). Autoethnography is queer. In N. K. Denzin, Y. S. Lincoln & L. T. Smith (Eds.), *Handbook of critical and indigenous methodologies* (pp. 373 – 390). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Adams, T. E., Holman-Jones, S., & Ellis, C. (2015). *Autoethnography: Understanding qualitative research*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

American Psychological Association (2009). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th edition). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

American Psychological Association (2020a). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th edition). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

American Psychological Association (2020b). *What's new in the publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th edition). Retrieved from https://apastyle.apa.org/instructional-aids/whats-new-7e-guide.pdf

Bager-Charleson, S., McBeath, A., & Plock, S. D. (2019). The relationship between psychotherapy practice and research: A mixed-methods exploration of practitioners' views. *Counselling & Psychotherapy Research*, 19(3), 195– 205. https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12196

Bloom, L. (1996). I write for myself and strangers. In S. Bunkers & C. Huff (Eds.), *Inscribing the daily* (pp. 23 – 37). Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.

Bondi, L., & Fewell, J. (2016). *Practitioner research in counselling and psychotherapy: The power of examples*. London, UK: Palgrave.

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. (2019). *Ethical guidelines for research in the counselling professions*. Retrieved from https://www.bacp.co.uk/media/3908/bacp-ethical-guidelines-for-research-in-counselling-professions-feb19.pdf

Burns, J., & Campbell, A. (2017). *Social mobility: The worst places to grow up poor*. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-42112436

Clandinin, J. (2016). *Engaging in narrative inquiry*. Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge.

Clandinin, J., Caine, V., & Lessard, S. (2018). *The relational ethics of narrative inquiry*. Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge.

Cohut, M. (2019, May 29). How to continue your research as an independent academic. *PhD Life.* Retrieved from https://phdlife.warwick.ac.uk/2019/05/29/how-to-continue-your-research-as-an-independent-academic/

Coleman, E. (1981–1982). Developmental stages of the coming out process. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *7*(2–3), 31–43. https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v07n02_06

Cooper, M. (2019, March 21). Publishing your research: Some pointers. *Mick Cooper Training and Consultancy.* Retrieved from https://mick-cooper.squarespace.com/new-blog/2019/3/21/publishing-your-research-some-pointers

Data Protection Act. (1998). UK Act of Parliament. Retrieved from http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/29/contents

Dixon, N. (2001). Writing for publication: A guide for new authors. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, *13*(5), 417-421. https://doi.org/10.1093/intqhc/13.5.417

Ellis, C. (2007). Telling secrets, revealing lives: Relational ethics in research with intimate others. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *13*(1), 3–29. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800406294947

Etherington, K. (2004). *Becoming a reflexive researcher: Using ourselves in research*. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

European Journal for Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy. (2020). *Author Guidelines*. Retrieved from http://ejqrp.org/index.php/ejqrp/about/submissions#authorGuidelines

Finlay, L. (2020). How to write a journal article: Top tips for the novice writer. *European Journal for Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy*, *10*, 28-40. Retrieved from http://ejqrp.org/index.php/ejqrp/article/view/108

GDPR.eu. (2020). General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Retrieved from https://gdpr.eu/tag/gdpr/

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

McBeath, A., Bager-Charleson, S., & Abarbanel, A. (2019). Therapists and academic writing: "Once upon a time psychotherapy practitioners and researchers were the same people". *European Journal for Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy*, *9*, 103-116. Retrieved from http://www.ejqrp.org/index.php/ejqrp/article/view/81

McLeod, J. (2011). *Qualitative research in counselling and psychotherapy* (2nd edition). London, UK: Sage Publications.

McPherson, A. S. (2020). Client-initiated disclosure of psychotherapists' sexual orientation: A narrative inquiry. *Counselling & Psychotherapy Research, 20*(2), 365–377. https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12274

Murray, R. (2020). *Writing for academic journals* (4th edition). London, UK: Open University Press.

Plummer, K. (2019). *Narrative power: The struggle for human value.* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Resurchify. (2020). *Impact factor search engine*. Retrieved from https://www.resurchify.com/impact-factor.php

Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. London, UK: Sage Publications.

Settle, K. (2017, December 24). *The Greatest Showman | "This Is Me" with Keala Settle | 20th Century FOX* [Video]. You Tube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLFEvHWD_NE

Squire, C. (2017). Life Stories: Narrating Difficulty, Mixing Forms, Making Theory, Performing Collectivity. In J. Maybin (Ed.), *Narrative, language and creativity: Contemporary approaches*. Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press.

Tillmann-Healy, L. M. (2003). Friendship as method. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *9*(5), 729–749. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800403254894

Wiley Online Library. (2020). *Author guidelines*. Retrieved from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/17461405/homepage/ForAuthors.html

Woods, P. (2005). *Successful writing for qualitative researchers.* (2nd edition). Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge.

Zur, O. (2008). The google factor: Therapists' self-disclosure in the age of the internet: Discover what your clients can find out about you with a click of a mouse. *The Independent Practitioner, 28,* 83–85.

About the Author

Alan S. McPherson is an Integrative Counsellor, Psychotherapist and Supervisor in private practice in Leicester, UK. His practice is underpinned by a humanistic and integrative approach, drawing on the relational and developmental. Alan trained at the Sherwood Psychotherapy Training Institute (SPTI) in Nottingham and is now one of SPTI's self-employed tutors on the bachelor's degree in Counselling and Psychotherapy. He has many research curiosities, being particularly drawn towards narrative approaches to research. He is currently developing his identity as a fledgling independent researcher-practitioner.