



## Research Engagement in 55 words (Flash Fiction)

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## Research Engagement in 55 words (Flash Fiction)

Various Authors

For this special issue on arts-based research, we invited submissions of 55-word fictional pieces, which we could term flash fiction, addressing research engagement in some way. This could relate to researchers, methods, participants, reflexivity, or any relevant issue relating to research engagement. Accepted submissions are presented below in random order.

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### *The Psychologist's Desk*

A preprint featuring coloured brain images (a steal at \$12,000) formed the first strata. Lower down came a decade worth of journals, still shrink-wrapped. Shards of a one-way mirror created the next layer, followed by a decomposing Skinner box and brass instruments dulled by overuse. At the bottom lay a moleskine dream diary, abandoned at age 18.

Michael Pettit,  
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### *A Participant*

We stayed online until the wee hours, talking, laughing, and weeping. It's a gift, these shared thoughts and emotions filling the words I write down later, trying to "make sense of" her life. She laughs, "good luck with that!" and keeps giving. I'll express gratitude for her "generosity" and publish my interpretations in nameless faceless lines.

Anita Harman,  
Independent Researcher/Scholar, European Union  
[anitaharman@outlook.com](mailto:anitaharman@outlook.com)

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### *Emergence*

"Themes emerged," he said, and I wondered again what emergence looks like. I considered asking, "Did they rise from the data, fully formed, like Boticelli's painting *The Birth of Venus*, or did they start as shapeless lumps that slowly became more recognizable, like the pod people in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*," but I didn't.

Sheryl L. Chatfield,  
Kent State University, United States  
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*The Philosopher and the Magician*

The neophyte researcher has a tricky path to navigate. How can she demonstrate quality and draw credible findings hidden in the labyrinthine interview data vaults? She has to be both philosopher and magician, to accept that there are multiple truths and that the skilful researcher uses her arts to interpret and co-construct what is veiled.

Alexandra Consterdine,  
Manchester Metropolitan University, United Kingdom  
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*Arrive Penn Station*

Arrive Penn Station. Take fast “A” train uptown to hospital for research interviews. I know this place, paint peeling, corridors dark and smelly, uncle Charlie died here, nothing changed. The receptionist looks up, eating lunch, music blaring, laughing with patients. “Pharmacy rep, any free stuff today?” My heart aches, emotional home to me, outsider to them.

Karen Wyche,  
George Washington University, United States  
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*Story Seeker*

Qualitative researcher  
Gathering meaning from experience  
Tell me your story.

Conversational interview  
Did I listen to your words, or  
Was I thinking about my next question?

Let's be clear  
If you're one step ahead, then  
You're absent in the process.

Reflection on practice  
You shared openly, and  
I listened intently.

Words become worlds  
Story captured.

Margaret Saturley,  
University of South Florida, United States  
[msaturley@usf.edu](mailto:msaturley@usf.edu)

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*Metamorphosis*

Perplexed, I try to marshal my discordant, disparate, half-formed ideas into a coherent form. I fail. Under closed eyelids, they scud across my consciousness, twisting and changing, refusing to crystallize under pressure. So I force myself to relax, to give these transient notions the freedom to transform and metamorphose into something tangible, yet ephemeral.

Alexandra Consterdine,  
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*Phenomenological Approaches to the Social Psychology of Radical Community Organizers*

You call it local knowledge  
I call it Mama's cooking.  
You say "Phenomenology"  
I says  
it will keep the demons 'way.  
My voice you ask for?  
Gonna cram it inna jar and stick it  
On some shelf for all to see?  
You say you want a story  
But you really want to feel our pulse.

Christopher W. Hoffman,  
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*Interviewing Talk*

I listen. They thought and spoke at the same time. It was not just what was uttered but also the tempo, punctuation, and pauses. Sometimes the silence spoke more than the response. Both of us hearing it for the first time, thinking what it might mean and would it mean the same tomorrow. I listen.

Bill Taylor,  
Manchester Metropolitan University, United Kingdom  
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*Poetresearcher*

My research report equals my poetry: each is uniquely mine. I experienced, felt, thought, wrote, shared. My audience wasn't there when I thought and felt; they'll have to believe me. Weaving words, painting pictures, creating concepts. How did those experiences become those thoughts that became those words? My poetry emerges. Hopefully, it will move them.

Anita Harman,  
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*Inspiration*

The project was participatory action research for teachers and staff wellness at a care centre for youth-at-risk. You showed me your courage, your willingness to engage, your passion and pain, your growth and wisdom. You facilitated your own healing through silence, reflection, honesty, curiosity, laughter, and tears. As group facilitator, I was humbled and inspired.

Sharon Johnson,  
Stellenbosch University, South Africa  
[shajohnson@mweb.co.za](mailto:shajohnson@mweb.co.za)

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*No Downside*

“Let’s double check these responses with our interviewee. Respondent validation guarantees credibility and research engagement.”

“Actively engaging interviewees correspondingly facilitates researcher-respondent power balance. There’s simply no downside to this!”

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“So, Melanie, are our interpretations correct?”

“Yes,” said the victim of bullying in a trembling voice.

\*\*\*\*

Shortly afterward, her psychotherapist received an unexpected client visit.

Lakshmi B. Nair,  
Utrecht University, The Netherlands  
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*(Is There a) Middle Ground?***Proposition:**

“Qualitative inquiry needs a checklist.

A table of essential research actions, decisions, fixes.

For rigor and trustworthiness.

For engaging readers and reviewers.

Especially the critical positivists.”

**Counter-proposition:**

“Not a table. A word cloud or decision tree, maybe.

Let’s make it look nonformulaic and unrestrictive.

To stop provoking readers and reviewers.

Especially the critical interpretivists.”

Lakshmi B. Nair,  
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*An Invitation from my Creative Unconscious*

We used to be one. We played, we sang. But as you grew into the world, it banished me. Now we rendezvous only in your dreams and when you pick up that brush. The world now asks you contribute “new knowledge.” I am the key to the knowledge you seek. Summon me. I’ll guide you.

Rosa Bologna,  
Charles Sturt University, Australia  
[rosab@artandplay.com.au](mailto:rosab@artandplay.com.au)

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*The Ethnographer*

The elderly inmates at the carehome were sad that their intern social worker was leaving.

She used to sing beautiful songs and tell funny stories.

When they missed their children, she looked at old photographs with them and listened to their reminiscences.

She said she was their friend.

The staff called her “the ethnographer.”

Lakshmi B. Nair,  
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*Interpretation*

“So, does this NVivo program make these themes for you?” the poster judge asked. “Actually no,” I replied. “It just helps me with data management. I came up with the theme labels by clustering similar codes and comparing the data excerpts to summarize what I think participants meant to express.” “Thanks,” she said, walking away.

Sheryl L. Chatfield,  
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