

# Northumbria Research Link

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## The Research Interview

Harvey Humphrey

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We face each other at this surface made of wood  
this space familiar to you - the walls hold history  
new campaign posters you explain, I nod; understood  
you don't define the terms, do I see you reading me?

so why did you decide to participate I ask  
emphasising decide - to be involved is a choice  
reminding us both that this chat is a research task  
one in which I hope I will do justice to your voice

Hours later I'll check you still consent to the study  
but now we sit together in a moment in time  
with your words you bring to life decades of history  
interruptions of questions and laughter - yours and mine

as you speak the stories grow around us in the air  
made solidly of words they flourish in this present  
older terms once forgotten reappear as you share  
you hesitate clocking me have you caused me offense

no tell me more about this language, your terms, your words  
the air grows thick with history, older terms emerge  
terms from others: embraced, refused; reclaimed names; codewords  
then language a battleground as communities merge

Your memory nurtures the stories grown in this space  
speaking back but looking up to the walls' current work  
seeds of which sown in worn documents in the bookcase  
now though newer generations take the reigns; teamwork

fresh voices with new terms, some offshoots from older texts  
some brand new homegrown in grassroots' imagined future  
some are old-made-new terms reimagined with new depths  
you teach me delighted to be an introducer

I gather your words old and new in my hands gently  
keeping safe, holding them in Dictaphone-arms with care  
recorded while they grew not wishing to miss any  
placed with the others; stories from those who chose to share

you smile now as our conversation draws to a close  
can I keep that sense of you as words are analysed  
will I keep in touch let you know how the research goes  
careful not to lose these gently gathered living-person-words when research-words are revised and revised

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### Critical commentary

This poem embraces the research interview as a site of care (Harrison, MacGibbon, and Morton, 2001). It explores the mutual relationship of trust and care between participants and researcher. The poem highlights relationships that emerge within interviews including

being welcomed into a participants' space and hearing their stories. The poem represents the shared trust of an interview and the need for reminders of research including questions, Dictaphones and consent processes. The poem is framed by this with the detached title *The Research Interview* and the last line that captures the desire to do justice to participants' stories and the sense of them as a whole complex person while academic texts such as journals articles, theses, and abstracts go through revisions. Writing this poem was a way for me to discuss some of the joy and care that can be found in conducting an interview. The poem is drawn from fieldwork notes of qualitative interviews with trans, intersex and LGBTI activists undertaken by an openly trans researcher with previous involvement in activism (Humphrey, 2021). The complexity of 'insider' interviews is highlighted in the poem with references to "reading me" and "clocking me" and the ways in which I felt read by participants (Harris, 2015; Meadow, 2013). This is also shown with the use of language "define the terms". Language was important to the interview interactions and the wider project. The project embraced a poststructuralist approach to language that acknowledges that words performatively construct the world: "made solidly of words they flourish in this present". The broader research project addressed the 'iterability' (Derrida, 1973; 1988) of language particularly in relation to identity terms and this is seen through references to "reclaimed names" and "reimagined terms". This poem brings out the importance of language throughout the interviews, the project, and as way to capture the joy and care in qualitative interviewing.

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