

## Nurturing a Performative Self

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**Abstract:** In this article we reflect on our own journeys towards becoming performative social science researchers with the hope that our experiences might be useful to others who have embarked, or wish to embark, on their own performative journeys. We consider the kinds of researcher-self that might be required to make performative projects happen and suggest that certain qualities are needed of performative social scientists which differ from, and may be in tension with, those qualities required of traditional social science researchers. In the context of a social science that continues to be dominated by the values, attitudes and practices of traditional science, we want to suggest that performative selves need to be *nurtured* to allow the necessary space and time to develop, mature and be realised.

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## 1. Introduction

Performative social science is a new discipline. Where, then, do today's and tomorrow's performative social scientists come from? They are not, yet at least, the products of performative social science degree courses or programmes. In this article we wish to explore the complex and lengthy process by which we are ourselves moving towards becoming performative researchers. We contribute our thoughts and reflections here in the hope that our experiences might prove useful for others who wish to embark (or already have embarked) on their own journey towards performative social science. [1]

In our research with Olympic, paralympic, and professional athletes (e.g., DOUGLAS & CARLESS, 2006a, 2006b), a frequent and recurring narrative thread is that they did not set out to become "champions". Like these athletes, neither of us set out to become performative researchers. In our case, a gradual

coming together of previous experiences, aptitudes, interests, passions, and so on, have resulted in a partnership which provides a smattering of the kinds of qualities that have allowed us to explore this new and challenging approach. It is our backgrounds outside academia—the skills we have learned, honed, and struggled to deploy in other areas of professional work and life—that have equipped us with some of the tools, sensitivity, and expertise with which to begin incorporating performative approaches in our research. [2]

According to Norman DENZIN (2000, p.904), "the performance turn in the human disciplines poses three closely interrelated problems for a critical, interdisciplinary interpretive project—namely, how to construct, perform and critically analyse performance texts". For us, the questions of how performative social science is created, performed, and evaluated cannot be divorced from questions concerning the kinds of researcher-selves that are needed to engage in this work. The two are intricately related. If we are to address DENZIN's concerns, it is in our view necessary to consider the process of creating, performing and evaluating from the inside out: through exploring the kinds of researcher-selves that are needed to make performative work happen. In a similar way to how DENZIN (2003) describes performance ethnography as a way of *showing* how people enact cultural meaning in their daily lives, we aim to show in this article, through a storied approach, how our own turn towards performative social science has been shaped by our biographies and backgrounds. In doing so, we hope to show how diverse and seemingly unrelated factors can all be important in the process of becoming a performative social science researcher. [3]

## 2. In the Beginning ...

When we first met, in early 1999, David was already a performing musician, had been a singer-songwriter for a decade, had his own modest recording studio at home and was producing professional-quality CD's of his songs. He was also lecturing at Exeter University on the sport science course where Kitrina attended his module on movement problems in physical activity. Kitrina, at the time an undergraduate student, had spent 20 years as a professional sportswoman, was making weekly trips to Paris working for the television company Eurosport as a presenter on a golf programme and was a commentator/summariser for BBC Radio Five Live outside broadcasts. Later that year, both of us began our doctoral studies at Bristol University where, due to space limitations, we made use of the cellar in the department building as a shared office. It was in this basement office that the seeds of our performative collaborations were sown. We talked, became friends, and embarked on a number of freelance projects—including writing books, teaching manuals, opinion articles and news items for BBC online, public speaking engagements, giving seminars and invited lectures outside academia—to pay the bills. [4]

Looking back, this work facilitated the development of a close and trusting working relationship in which ideas and thoughts—however crazy or off-the-cuff—could be shared, explored, developed or dropped with minimal fear of recrimination or ridicule. At the same time, collaborating on these projects over a

period of several years allowed us each to appreciate the other's areas of expertise as well as those areas where skills were lacking. As a result, and over the years, we were able to meld together our partial and separate selves in such a way as to provide a relatively versatile "whole". In essence, we learnt how to bypass our *individual* deficiencies and weaknesses by drawing on our *communal* expertise and strengths to get the job done: to meet and satisfy the budgets, deadlines and demands of funding agencies, governing bodies, media companies, and private organisations. [5]

### 3. Evolutionary Academic Selves?

It was also in this basement office that we began to explore some deeper philosophical questions concerning the kind of self that each of us wanted to be, both in our work and in our lives more generally. We both started to become aware of the ways in which the selves which were developing in the context of traditional social science were in harmony or discord with our personal lives. Arthur BOCHNER (1997) writes of his own experience of a "divided self" which he describes as a large gulf separating the academic from the personal. In so doing, he expresses concerns over the consequences of splitting the "academic self" from the "personal self":

"The sad truth is that the academic self frequently is cut off from the ordinary, experiential self. A life of theory can remove one from experience, make one feel unconnected. All of us inhabit multiple worlds. When we live in the world of theory, we usually assume that we are inhabiting an objective world. There, in an objective world, we are expected to play the role of spectator. It is a hard world for a human being to feel comfortable in, so we try to get rid of the distinctly human characteristics that distort the mythological beauty of objectivity. We are taught to master methods that exclude the capriciousness of immediate experience. When we do, we find ourselves in a world devoid of spirituality, emotion, and poetry—a scientific world in which, as Galileo insisted, there is no place for human feelings, motives, or consciousness." (BOCHNER, 1997, p.422) [6]

The perceived divide of which BOCHNER writes was familiar to our own experiences. Like him, we were also beginning to confront what we both experienced as a gulf between these different aspects of our lives. As time went on, we began through conversation to become aware of the ways in which selves that were front stage in one environment disappeared within another. For example, Kitrina would attend and enjoy David's gigs but this performer-singer-songwriter self would disappear during his day-to-day activities as a researcher. Similarly, David would hear Kitrina on the radio but she would describe this public self as a show, an act put on to entertain rather than a self she was comfortable with. [7]

As we became closer friends we began to take liberties with the questions we asked each other, exploring further how these other selves fitted with, or were in tension with, the self that was in the process of evolving—being created or constricted?—within academic life. We wondered, as BOCHNER (1997, p.423)

has before us, "Was the academic life I was living one that I had chosen, or was it one chosen for me by my mentors and by the orthodox academic practices I had unconsciously internalized and embodied?" We wonder still about the costs of what seems in some quarters to be a taken-for-granted evolutionary process. What kinds of self result from striving for objectivity, distance and neutrality? What kinds of social science do these selves produce? What are the consequences of this for the participants in our research? What are the consequences for researchers themselves? [8]

#### 4. Provocations ...

Kitrina often used to provoke David to reconsider his belief that he needed to separate his academic self (at that time positivistic by default, striving towards the scientific "ideals" of detachment, objectivity, generalisability) from his performing-singer-songwriter self (a self which was creative, inspirational, vulnerable, sensitive, unpredictable, mystical, elusive and entirely subjective). The latter self clearly needed protection and space within the critical analytical environment of the academy which seeks so frequently to deconstruct, to take apart. In this context, a clear divide offered a sense of protection. In much the same way as BOCHNER (1997) writes of experiencing a divided self, David, in describing the differences between writing a song and writing traditional research dissertations and papers, made a clear distinction between these two selves. He would excuse himself by saying, "I use a different part of my brain", as if the existence, survival and development of each depended on the other remaining detached and "at a distance". [9]

Along with asking David how he wrote songs, Kitrina would occasionally watch and listen to him write. First, in a moment of peace and space, he'd stumble upon a rhythm and perhaps a chord progression. He would then play the same riff, over and over, until it appeared from the outside to have "stuck". For Kitrina, these were exciting moments at the heart of the creative process; she has never grown tired of hearing the same few words or notes played over and over and over again as this is the signal of an impending song. Once he appeared to have settled on some words, over the course of a couple of hours or a morning a song would have been created. David likens the process to going fishing; he describes it as partly out of control, he is unsure whether he is the fisherman hooking the song or the fish to be hooked *by* the song. At other times, when working on an academic text, Kitrina would see a very different kind of creative process as David *wrestled* over a manuscript, in a far more deliberate and forceful manner, pacing back and forth, with another self in ascendance: one he would describe as "logical", "disciplined" and "focussed". [10]

## 5. A Matter of Authenticity?

Through her work in drama, sport, journalism, television, and radio, Kitrina's background frequently necessitated the overt use of performance-related skills. It seemed, however, that these diverse skills—which had provided her with an income for the majority of her life—were no longer needed or valued in her role as a social scientist. Although, unlike David, she felt no pressure to consciously separate one self from the other, she had no vision of how to go about incorporating her background as a performer into the tasks of conducting, writing and presenting academic research. At the same time, within the context of golf-related broadcasting, Kitrina was increasingly coming to question the self that put on a "good show"—an illusion—which made golf sound interesting and drew listeners into the programme. It was a charade that, while fun and challenging for a while, was fast becoming a futile endeavour; one which had lost its appeal. Of course, it still paid the bills and appeared to bring great kudos and interest from others—but the kudos and interest was in a self that was not, Kitrina believed, authentic. [11]

As HOCHSCHILD (1983/2003) has shown, while actors are not generally expected to *be* the person they play in a role—the act stops when the curtain falls—this does not apply to other occupations. Within sport culture, it is often assumed that everyone involved—the media, commentators and professional sportspeople—"love" what they do for a living. To be accepted in this culture, one must appear to be authentic. If one does not "love" the culture of elite sport, it is necessary to perform passion and authenticity for those who are watching and listening. As HOCHSCHILD (1983/2003, p.47) describes,

"In acting the illusion starts out as an illusion. In every-day life, that definition is always a possibility and never quite a certainty. On stage, the illusion leaves as it came, with the curtain. Off stage, the curtains close, too, but not at our bidding, not when we expect, and too often at our dismay. On stage, the illusion is a virtue. But in real life, the lie to oneself is a sign of human weakness, of bad faith. It is far more unsettling to discover that we have fooled ourselves than to discover that we have been fooling others." [12]

We see now that Kitrina's sense of authenticity was challenged and unsettled primarily by the *feelings* she experienced through her sport broadcasting work. At these times, Kitrina's sense of authenticity was compromised when she acted *against* the feelings of tension and discomfort she experienced while broadcasting. In contrast, the creative and performative directions Kitrina was pursuing through her interpretive research resulted in a strong sense of authenticity which she experienced as a felt emotion. David was, at the same time, experiencing similar tensions in terms of finding and retaining a sense of authenticity. While he experienced an authentic sense of self when performing his songs, this was threatened when he attempted to work within the expectations of a traditional, positivistic, quantitative social science. [13]

John McLEOD (1997, p.27) considers that "The task of being a person in a culture involves creating a satisfactory-enough alignment between individual experience and 'the story of which I find myself a part'." This theoretical position, we believe, best explains the presence and absence of our own sense of authenticity. For Kitrina, it was simply impossible to achieve a satisfactory-enough alignment between her own experience and feelings within the culture of sport media and broadcasting: the gulf was too great. Likewise, David found it impossible to achieve a satisfactory-enough alignment between his experiences and feelings within the culture of traditional social science. The result for both of us at these times was a lack of authenticity. [14]

While not consciously or deliberately setting out to work as performative social scientists, if we were vessels made for such a purpose it sometimes feels like we could not have been better prepared. We are both aware that skills honed—and selves developed—for work outside academia came to play a foundational role in the performative work in which we were about to become involved. From a personal perspective, it is through combining an interpretive philosophy and methodology with a performative orientation and sensibility that we have both been able to find a real sense of authenticity. From a professional perspective, our wranglings with authenticity were a necessary step because they provided the energy to fuel our initial forays into performative ways of working. Make no mistake, considerable energy *is* needed when these alternative approaches contravene or run up against traditional expectations. [15]

## 6. First Steps in Performative Social Science

During the latter stages of our doctoral studies we were both introduced to a book by Andrew SPARKES, *Telling Tales in Sport and Physical Activity* (SPARKES, 2002). In this book, breaking new ground in our field, SPARKES explores the potential of alternative forms of representation—including poetry, fiction, and ethnodrama—in sport related research. Both of us, separately, began to experiment with alternative representations of our own Ph.D. research. David wrote a series of short stories from his research with men who have mental illness (CARLESS & SPARKES, 2008) and Kitrina created poetic representations based on her research with women in high performance sport (SPARKES & DOUGLAS, 2007). [16]

The first public performance of this work took place at a departmental research conference in which David raised audience eyebrows by banging down his chair before reciting in the first-person a short story which tells of the experiences of one man with schizophrenia. The audience reaction was a telling illustration of the potential power of story and an embodied performance. Observing from the sidelines, Kitrina was aware that all attention was fully on David and the group appeared to be more engaged by this performance than they had been during the PowerPoint presentations of the professors who had spoken earlier in the day. Afterwards, one member of the audience, assuming that the first-person story related to his own experiences, approached David and began to ask him questions about the experiences recounted in the story. After David had

performed the story, Kitrina read the poems which were based upon the experiences of one participant in her research. For the first time she began to be more aware of how an embodied performance has the potential to affect an audience emotionally. Similarly, she became aware of how performing research in this way provided fresh appreciation of the piece, the person, the issues—and her own relation to each of these. [17]

Both of us shared an excitement for the way the audience seemed to have been stimulated by the performances and were surprised at the intensity of the effect it had on us, and the questions it inspired. Although neither of us were in a rush to continue to perform our work in academic contexts (as this performance had been challenging and emotionally demanding enough), important lessons had been learned, reinforcing feedback received, and it felt like the process *had* to now be continued. We had seen our academic work connecting with others, taking on something, a life of its own perhaps, in a way that neither of us had thought possible. [18]

## **7. Going Freelance ... and Taking Risks**

Having successfully completed our doctorates (in which we both included textual representations of these poems and stories), we were commissioned by the Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) as freelance researchers to undertake a study to explore the physical activity experiences of older women living in Cornwall. The WFS were supportive of a qualitative project and had been impressed by the power of poetry and stories in both of our Ph.D. research. However, the research took place against a backdrop of political issues. A key issue concerned the struggle for legitimacy experienced by a women's organisation working in a sporting culture dominated by hegemonic masculinity and an "evidence-based" research culture built upon a traditional scientific model. Although representatives of the funding agency could see that poetic representation, for example, was a powerful way to present findings, they did not want poetic representations included in the final report as they felt it would compromise its authority and legitimacy. As this was our first funded research project—we were both unsalaried researchers dependent on the commission—a primary objective was to deliver a report which met the requirements of the funding agency. [19]

In contrast, our own (unfunded) time was a different story. Independently, we both found ourselves unable to resist exploring the performative possibilities of the data through engagement in creative analytic processes. Buoyed by our first explorations during our Ph.D. work, we were both enthusiastic about the possibilities this project offered although neither of us had any specific goals or objectives in mind. At this stage of the project our interaction with the data could be described as "having fun" and "playing with" the data to "open up possibilities". We made no attempt at—nor did we even consider—serious evaluation in terms of "good" or "bad". Instead we independently lost ourselves in a creative process that involved a multi-layered and multi-dimensional exploration of the participants' stories and words as well as our personal reactions to those stories. [20]

## 8. "I've Got Poems!"

An extract from Kitrina's reflexive diary provides an account of the "arrival" of the first poetic representations as a result of these explorations:

"I had been in a meeting and was returning from Gloucester when I noticed I had a text, it read simply 'I've got poems!' I didn't need any explanation, like catching a bout of measles I knew David had caught the contagiousness of poetic representations. I by-passed my home and went straight to David's flat eager, excited and expectant to hear his poems. He stood in the kitchen, excited yet unconfident, exuberant yet cautious, holding a piece of paper in front of him he leant against the work top and began: 'It helps when you get old/To know what you want ...!'" (18<sup>th</sup> November 2004) [21]

To create the poems, David had to relinquish some of the control he was used to exerting in more traditional forms of analysis. Embarking on a creative process of discovery where it was necessary to *experience* and *react to* the "data" required something very different to the narrower focus of bringing a pre-determined meaning or theme to light. Relinquishing a degree of control over the analysis process is, we believe, a necessary step in learning from—and understanding meaning through—creative processes. We too experienced a process similar to one described by BLUMENFELD-JONES (2002, p.102): "I did not know that this was the meaning of the poem (for me) until I began the poem. Once I discovered it, I also realised that this could not have been known to me through other forms of analysis." [22]

Looking back, exploring the participants' stories through creative methods was an important way in which David continued to bridge what he experienced as a divide within himself: between the "scientific" and the "performative". By creating poetic representations from research data, he took a step towards merging his creative-performing self with his academic self. Importantly, creating and performing these poems provided an embodied experience of the creative process seeming to *work* in a research context: we had poems and they felt good. [23]

In saying the poems "felt good", we are trying to suggest that some kind of process of judgement has taken place. It was not, however, a cognitive, criterion based evaluation but rather a more elusive, embodied process that we find hard to describe at present. BLUMENFELD-JONES' (2002, p.93) description of this process once again fits our experience:

"When I have been delighted with something it is due to the aesthetics which are working to bring about, in me, some experience, some immediacy of insight, some FEELING which, in the immediacy of the moment, cannot be described but can only be." [24]

Despite our own feelings that the poetic representations had some worth and value, we both sought further feedback which we needed to be confident enough to continue with this work. One example of early feedback (which was pivotal, for

David at least) is recounted in this excerpt from his diary in which he performed (impromptu over coffee and Christmas cake) several of the poems for two new neighbours, Brian and Louise, who David had started lodging with. In his late sixties, Brian was a self-employed builder who had had some of his own short stories and poetry published. A similar age, Louise had previously been a journalist on a local newspaper in London.

"We talked about each others' interests and work and I got to telling them about the WSF research project. I said I'd written some poems from the interviews and asked if they'd mind if I read them aloud. They were very happy to listen and both were amazingly attentive. Before I began Brian in particular sat right back in his chair and eyed me in an intent, but supportive fashion. It's great to have people who *really* listen. While Louise remarked on the day and later that she really liked the poems and thought they were very good (seeming totally genuine) it was Brian who spoke more explicitly. He thought that they represented good poetry. In his view, the definition of a poem is *a distillation* ... Does the poem allow us to understand some wisdom or knowledge through another's experience? These poems he felt, did. He felt that the poems, particularly *When your time comes*, touched on the issues of death and loss which were relevant to him at his time of life but things he had not thought about too much about (or begun to prepare for) himself. He said that the poems might be a prompt for him to begin to do that. For me, it was fantastic to receive positive feedback on the poems as 'good' poems and it was all the more meaningful because Brian had published poetry himself. On top of this, both Brian and Louise saying that the poems had affected them in their own lives was hugely encouraging in terms of continuing with this work. Brian asked what I would do with the poems (he felt they should be included in the report for the WSF, perhaps as breaks between chapters/sections) and whether I would write any more poems. Before I could answer he said, 'You must'." (29<sup>th</sup> December 2004) [25]

## 9. "Take Me Dancing ..."

In January 2005 we invested our own time and money to travel to Cornwall, where the research took place, to spend two weeks absorbing more of the Cornish environment, immersing ourselves in day-to-day life in order, really, to see where it might lead. This kind of cultural and geographical "immersion" is a tactic many artists use. We took pictures of the towns and villages where we conducted interviews, took pictures of the countryside and the coast, and at other times made audio recordings of the sounds of Cornish life (which we subsequently used to provide background ambience for the *Across the Tamar* performance and CD). We strove to create for ourselves a "safe space"—an evocative environment in which we might follow hunches and take creative risks. [26]

As mentioned before, Kitrina had noticed that for David to write a song a number of things needed to be in place. He needed to have experiences to story in some way, time to allow these stories to "percolate", to be inspired by a riff, chord change, or rhythm. For all these things to happen, he needed time out from pressure to produce "outputs" that frequently bites into working life. Among other things, these two weeks provided David with an opportunity—a stepping stone—

to move towards creating the first song from the research "data". The creative process which ensued was unplanned, unpredictable, insightful, aesthetic—and brought together through a musical orientation. The outcome was a song entitled *Our Dancing Feat*. It is described in this extract from Kitrina's reflexive diary:

"I'd been for a run and then we had breakfast overlooking the sea. We'd been talking about the importance of touch and how many women talked about dancing and we were both aware of how aging appeared to signal a loss of touch ... It had been sunny but had begun to rain and we came indoors. David picked up his guitar and began to play, but not sing, he began to finger different riffs and then one began to stick, a 'hooky' combination. And before long the words 'Take me dancing' came: David was crossing the Tamar!" (9<sup>th</sup> January 2005) [27]

There is perhaps no more an exciting time than seeing a friend make a transformational change. Reflecting later on this moment, we are both aware that rather than being a sudden change, it was a gradual process of "becoming" whereby David learnt to combine his previously divided academic and performing-singer-songwriter selves. [28]

Again, while we were both intrinsically happy with the songs, we were anxious to obtain feedback from others. Brian and Louise provided some of the earliest feedback on the new songs as the following excerpt from David's diary recounts:

"We chatted for a bit and then told them about the songs that I was about to play—that they came from the stories of the women in Cornwall whose lives we'd been researching ... I introduced *We Crossed the Tamar* as being the story of several women who had moved to Cornwall years back and had since lost their partners. I avoided eye contact as I played (as usual) but noticed that Brian's foot was tapping through part of the song ... I made a longer introduction to *One Step at a Time*, telling them about Marjorie having suffered from polio all her life, living in an upstairs council flat, and making her way up the stairs by placing her shopping one step at a time in front of her ... Brian commented on the old fishermen's widows ('husband's dead from fishing and/or drinking!') in Brixham with huge calves who walk up the steep hills back home with their shopping. He said he thought that was what kept them going ... I introduced *Our Dancing Feat* ... Brian mentioned how his 'ex-, ex-wife' still danced every week although she was in her 70's. They seemed to like the song. Brian commented that he thought I was hooking into the tradition of music with a social conscience and message which went back, for example, to Ralph McTell's *Streets of London*. He thought these songs would not be to everyone's liking, but would appeal to older people 'like us' or 'people who are saddened, or angry, about social justice—or injustice—and how people are forced to live in certain ways'." (14 March 2005) [29]

Once again, this kind of feedback, for David, was important in reinforcing his and Kitrina's feeling that the songs were "good"—that they had some worth, value, and a potential purpose. It provided the necessary belief to justify investing more of our own time and money to record the songs and to perform them for others. To a great extent, responses like these also reinforced our own sense of authenticity which we both felt had arisen through bringing our performative

selves into the social science arena. For David, this necessitated the removal of a pre-existing divide between academic research and songwriting/performance. Through writing and performing poems and songs from a piece of commissioned research we both felt that, in some way, we had been able to "close the loop"—to experience a real sense of authenticity in our work. [30]

## 10. Reflections

During 2005 we went on to create a performance piece entitled *Across the Tamar* which incorporates songs, poems and stories stemming from the research project. We initially performed *Across the Tamar*, in whole or in part, to several audiences of older people in Cornwall and to numerous gatherings of friends, family, and acquaintances. Subsequently, we have also performed the work at several academic conferences (CARLESS & DOUGLAS, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b; DOUGLAS & CARLESS, 2006c) and have made an audio recording of the performance (DOUGLAS & CARLESS, 2005). Taken together, these performances—live and recorded—have been greeted with more enthusiasm, passion and emotion than any other research in which we have been involved to date. [31]

We would like to close by considering two important issues of which we have become aware through doing this work. Both seem to us critical to the ongoing development and realisation of performative social science projects. The first of these issues concerns feedback from others. As mentioned earlier, we both felt the need for feedback and response from others to justify and "validate" in some way our continuing creative and performative efforts. This is not surprising as we are aware of no guidelines (as yet) for the development of performative social science: we had no map or directions for the task we were attempting. We were in uncharted territory—we needed clues as to whether we were on track. Critically, we depended on this feedback in order to be confident enough to continue developing, performing and recording our work. [32]

We realised quickly that approaching scientific colleagues for feedback during the developmental phases of the project would be a mistake. This was illustrated for us by two women's responses to an impromptu performance of our early work: Jodie, a Cornish resident whose husband had recently died and Helen, a professor in the human sciences who was visiting Jodie in Cornwall. Immediately after David had performed the song *We Crossed the Tamar*, Jodie began to weep, before gathering herself, banging her hands on the table and saying: "That's *exactly* what it's like! And no-one understands. That is exactly what it's like." Although Jodie had clearly been emotionally affected by the song and found it a personally relevant and validating experience, Helen responded by saying: "Yes, its very nice, but its just one person's story. It's not research." With this response, we both felt that Helen was trivialising the work and dismissing its potential to contribute to understandings of older women's physical activity. [33]

Reflecting on this moment now, we realise that it was crucial during the development of the project that we received feedback from people who were

prepared to *personally* immerse themselves in the work, rather than to judge the work against potentially inappropriate "objective" criteria. To understand whether or not the songs were relevant to people's lives, we needed listeners who allowed their *own* life experiences *into* the performance—rather than listeners who sought or defended a dispassionate criteria-based stance. For us at this stage, feedback from the kind of academics who inhabit a world which BOCHNER (1997, p.424) characterises as out of touch with "the everyday world of experience, the ordinary world" would be potentially damaging to the creative process. Songwriter Rickie Lee JONES has described the dangers of inappropriate critique during the process of creating new work:

"Since I became a professional, it's been hard for me not to critique my work while I'm doing it. And that can destroy it. 'Cause it really is a spirit being born. It's a living spirit. When people hear it, a spirit happens to them. And you have to be really quiet and careful with it when it's first being born, and you can't tell it its wrong, 'cause it will just die." (ZOLLO, 2003, p.480) [34]

For us too, it has been essential to resist critiquing or judging new work too soon. Once new pieces have been written, feedback and critique can be valuable in order to refine and develop the work, but even then it is important that appropriate feedback is offered. During the early and tentative stages of performance, it was imperative that we sought feedback from people—participants, other older people, family members, acquaintances, musicians, academics working in the creative arts—who were willing to lend a sensitive and "human" ear. It was these responses that allowed us to retain our enthusiasm for the work and provided the impetus for our continued efforts fully realise this performative project. The reactions of more traditionally oriented social scientists like Helen could be explored later, once the performance was developed, refined, and "polished". For us, this lesson has important implications for the kinds of support and feedback we offer to students and colleagues during the critical (and potentially vulnerable) stages of creating, developing and refining performative works. [35]

A second important lesson we have learned well through our performative efforts is that while reflecting on our personal journeys can be informative and constructive, performative work is not ultimately about the self. There is a bigger picture. Finding a sense of authenticity—in terms of developing a personally meaningful and satisfying way of *doing* social science—is important, we think, not so much because it has been a positive experience for us, but because in seeking authenticity we have stumbled upon alternative ways of working. The establishment of alternative—performative—approaches has important implications for the kind of social science that our research community produces. As we now see, our difficult and lengthy journey towards finding a personally authentic way of doing research through a performative orientation has shaped the kinds of knowledge that we produced and communicated about the lives of the participants in our research. Thus, the kinds of selves we mobilise in our work have implications for a bigger picture which extends beyond our own lives. In our view, there is therefore a need for more performative social scientists to step forward and do the kinds of work that may complement, enrich or challenge texts

of traditional social science works. Thus, while incorporating our performative selves within social science has been personally rewarding and has felt authentic, we hope that nurturing performative selves within academia will ultimately help create a social science that provides new understandings of human experience while making a positive difference to the lives of others. [36]

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