

Performing the Invisible: A Poem About and From Invisible Insiders

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In this piece, we present a found poem (Butler-Kisber, 2002) created from data that we recorded concerning our invisible identities. This project was dubbed “Invisible Insiders,” a term that we used to describe our various identities that were not immediately knowable to research participants unless we shared them. Researchers utilizing found poetry honor participants’ voices; as Leavy (2015) explains, “When there is an affinity between the research project and the poetic form, [poetic inquiry] can capture a unique aspect of the human condition, thereby expanding our understanding of social reality” (p. 90). Over the course of six months, we journaled about our backgrounds and the thought processes we go through each time we decide to share these invisible identities with research participants. These identities included our sexualities, disability statuses, mental health issues, family lives, and backgrounds.

Being invisible is similar “to reside[ing] and/or inhabit[ing] the borderlands... to be in a constant state of flux and transition” (Marshall & Oliva, 2009, p. 102), never here nor there, and at times not good enough for either. We allow ourselves to be “meaning-making tool[s] that facilitate the exploration of identity” by placing ourselves in the roles of “researcher” and “researcher participant” (Hoppe, 2014, p. 64). This allows us to explore “what has been and what is now the nature of [our] educational experience” (Pinar, 1975, p. 4) and how our personal lives affect our experiences. Further, Ellis (1997) argues that this process allows us to “fluently move back and forth, first looking inward, then outward, then backward, and forward, until the distinctions between the individual and social are blurred beyond recognition and the past, present, and future become continuous” (p. 132).

The poem, below, represents our experiences and perspectives as though they were coming from a single researcher—a practice Rambo (2019) refers to as strange accounting. This process allows us to remain safe and anonymous, as there is not clear linking of which words belong to which author.

PERFORMING THE INVISIBLE

I’m invisible.

I pass.

I perform.

 I’m not gay enough.

 I’m not disabled enough.

 I’m not suffering the same.

So.

Much.

Resistance.

Performativity.

Fear.

I cringe in public.

I'm not gay enough.

I'm not disabled enough.

I'm not suffering the same.

I'm not validated.

Emotionally re-traumatizing.

So.

Much.

Resistance.

You ask for my "credentials."

You look me up and down.

I'm not gay enough.

I'm not disabled enough.

I'm not suffering the same.

I'm not validated.

I'm non-existent.

So.

Much.

Resistance.

To the insiders,

I'm not gay enough.

I'm not disabled enough.

I'm not suffering the same.

I'm not validated.

I'm non-existent.

I'm not approved.

So.

Much.

Resistance.

I disclose,

You resist.

I disclose,

You question.

I am angry.

I am pissed.

I'm not gay enough.

I'm not disabled enough.

I'm not suffering the same.

I'm not validated.

I'm non-existent.

I'm not approved.

So.
 Much.
 Resistance.

I'm honest with myself,
 I'm not competing in the disability olympics.

My back hurts, too.

NO.

Change what you call me?

NO.

You're just differently abled.

NO.

I'm all too aware of this.
I understand your feelings.

NO.

You.

Don't.

I am an Invisible insider with complicated feelings.

I'm othered.

I risk being ostracized.

You're a liar, exaggerator, fraudulent.

You don't see it.

It's not real.

I'm ashamed.

I suffer with,
 Much thought.

Mental exhaustion.

The card is always in the deck.

I'm not gay enough.

I'm not disabled enough.

I'm not suffering the same.

I'm not validated.

I'm non-existent.

I'm not approved.

When will the card be dealt?

Dis/ability?

I still don't know.

I am stuck.

Lost.

I perform.

Is my disability just a friend tagging along?

I am now even more lost.

How did you get on the list?

What is your insider status?

I am
 Latinx.
 Disabled.
 Bisexual.
 Anxious.
 An amputee.
 A Queerspawn.
 A military spouse.
 A woman in higher education.

Pick.

One.

Damn it.

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