Gaslighting\textsuperscript{1} of the “Compromised”: Disabled and Fat During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

As authors, we have navigated messages and confusing directives how to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic as people who are labelled “compromised.” Our health became an individual responsibility, as we were labelled more likely to experience severe outcomes. As we navigated medical guidance, we were inundated with messages that our bodies were the problem, that if we feared COVID, to stay home and it wouldn’t happen to us. At the same time, we were told that we “live in fear” while navigating ever changing recommendations, restrictions, and waves of disease.

Keywords: COVID-19; Arts-Based Research; Fat Studies; Disability; Poetic Inquiry

Introduction

This poem and photograph tell a part of our stories of what it is has been like to navigate COVID-19 in our bodies. Using poetry as part of our multisensory story allowed us to create a piece that is specific to our experience but can expand to be universal as the audience relates to the words as if they are their own (Faulkner, 2018) in addition to the contrasting voices that can be sensed in their differing tone, delivery, and meaning. The two separate oral readings of the poem illustrate important nuance. The First Reading is aggressive, animated, and imagined through the voice of those with power and authority, who delivered updates, encouragement, and medical advice during the pandemic. The Second Reading is how the words of the poem create affective meaning of confusion, pain, and ultimately being gaslight for those who are considered compromised. The inclusion of the image captures the nuances of our experience and important subtleties difficult to convey in written word (Holm, Sahlström, & Zilliacus, 2018). While viewing the piece, we ask our audience to observe the image while listening to the first reading of the poem followed with the second reading. It is our hope that combining these two approaches captures the embodied and complex experience of navigating the COVID-19 pandemic as people labelled “compromised”.

\textsuperscript{1} Gaslighting refers to the psychological manipulation by someone to make an individual or group of people question their sanity.
Title: Embodied Manipulation
(i) **First Reading**: Voice of Authority and Power

*Video Link*: https://vimeo.com/662019156

(ii) **Second Reading**: Voice of Uncertainty and Question

*Video Link*: https://vimeo.com/662019201
Power, Manipulation, and Control in the COVID-19 Pandemic

For a disease that does not generally threaten life, apart from the compromised

We cannot impair the social and economic health of our population

It only happens to some

Disabled, fat, chronically ill to name a few

If this is you

Isolate

Stay home

Protect yourself

It is on you

But were they compromised?

What was their condition?

Questions rarely asked before

It won’t be you

Don’t let yourself be controlled

Transmission is low

Forget about

Long-term complications

Severe outcomes

Inevitable death of the discarded

Stop living in fear

It’s basically over, didn’t you hear?
References
