

# Emotional Labour, Feeling Powerless, and Researcher Vulnerability: Reflections on Ethnography with Team UK Invictus 2023

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Exploring the  
Impact of the  
Invictus Games  
Düsseldorf 2023

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**INVICTUS**  
**GAMES**  
FOUNDATION



Where we started...



experience = 0

Disabled



Women



Immigrants



Work we do is to serve marginalised groups, but marginalised groups have unique stories, experiences and 'solutions' to equity

For me – awkward ambivalence

## Where They Started...

- 64% diagnosed mental health illness
- 66% two or more chronic conditions
- Loss of identity
- Perceive low resilience
- “If you’ve not been through it you just won’t get it”

“PTSD-sufferer”

“broken”

“un-deserving”

“a failure”

“EX-military”



# A Coming Together of Awkward

## Introducing the team



Dr Don Vinson

Specialism in evaluation and Coach learning



Dr Emma Richardson

Specialism in adapted sport and exercise research



Dr Gabriela Misca

Specialism in military and veteran families research



Professor Győző Molnár

Specialism in sociology of sport and identity

“self-  
superior”

“super-  
woke”

“ivory  
tower  
dwellers”

“smelly  
civvies”

“parasites”

“outsiders”

Why (or  
why  
wouldn't  
they) think  
that?!

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Long and very chequered history of research done ON disabled communities by non-disabled researchers for own gain (Fitzgerald, 2009)

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Previous experiences of being made to do research they didn't really want to do as they did not have power to say no

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Experiences of commissioned officers with degrees "lording over" members without degrees

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We do not come to research as empty vessels, and neither do participants

# Where we are now

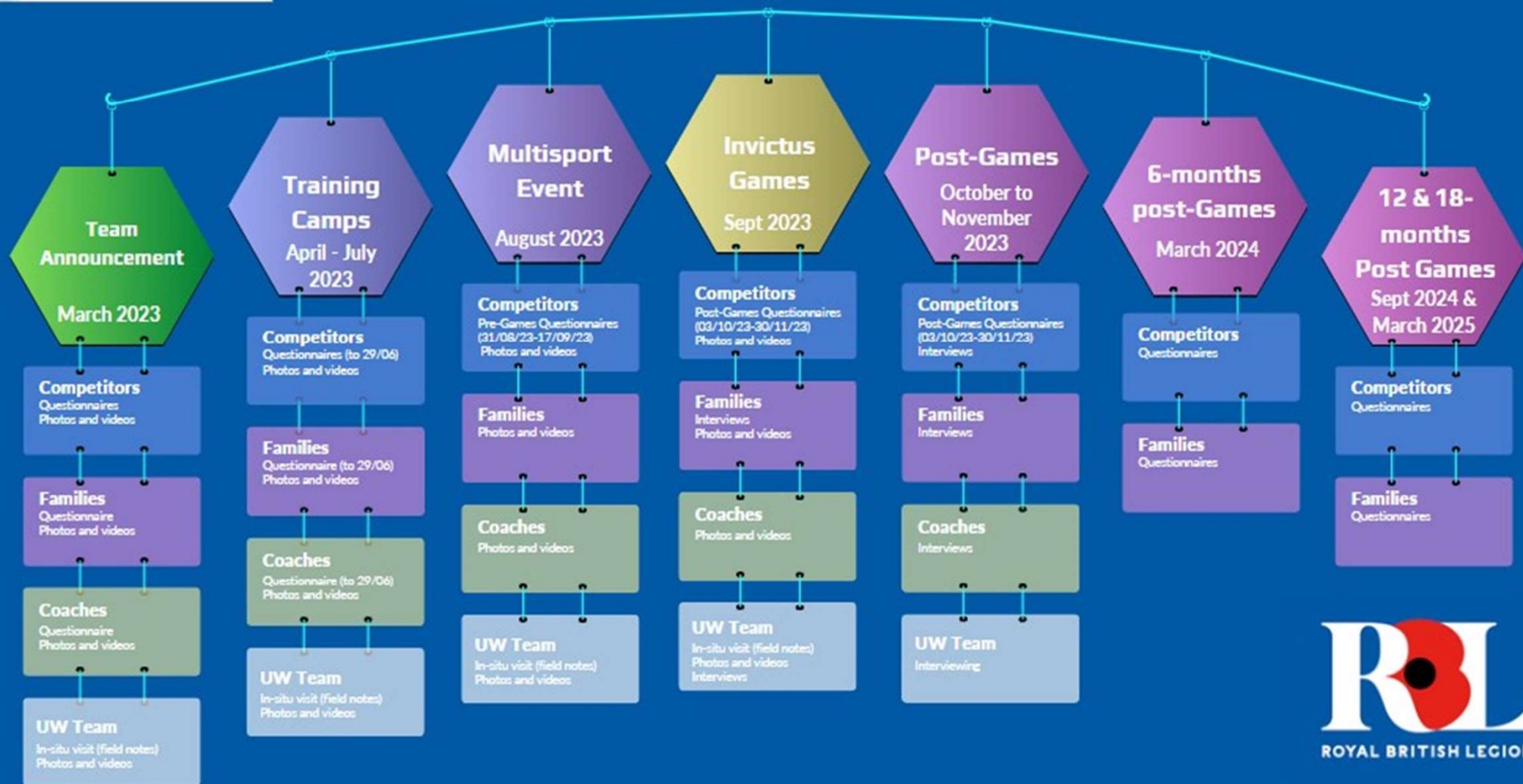
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- “You guys are seriously part of the team”
  - “We’re so glad you’re coming”
  - “Research wankers!”
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- How did we get there?





# EVALUATION TIMELINE





# Vulnerable Observers (Baher, 1996, 2022)

- Researcher vulnerability essential part of ethnography
- Affect and are affected emotionally, physically, ontologically

“...vulnerability doesn't mean that anything personal goes. The exposure of the self as a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn't otherwise get to. It has got to be essential to the argument, not a decorative flourish, not exposure for its own sake...”  
(p.14)



# Sharing Our Transparent Selves

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- Vulnerability is a shared ontological condition – to ask participants to be vulnerable, we must be vulnerable ourselves (Rodgers et al., 2012)





# Being A Grunt

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- “Finally, a practical job academics can do!”



# (Re)Interpreting 'Ethical' Rules

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- “When we privilege highly bureaucratized protocols over human-to-human communications, we risk an erasure of humanity of everyone involved in research” (Lake & Hartmann, 2023)





# Broken Just Like Us!

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- “That’s why you were the perfect people for the job. You’re broken just like us!”



What were  
the costs of  
vulnerability?



Relationships

Triggering own  
traumas

Guilt

Weight of  
responsibility

Carrying 'feels' with  
us

All the emotions!

Hobbies and past  
times

Burnout

Injury



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We'd rather be a good people than good researchers, but it's a shame we sometimes have to choose.



# References and Image Credits

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