Negotiating the Complexities and Risks of Interdisciplinary Qualitative Research

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Abstract

This article interrogates the experiences of an interdisciplinary research team that engaged in a qualitative research program for over 5 years, beginning with the grant writing process through to knowledge dissemination. We highlight the challenges of constructing shared understanding and developing research synergies, embracing vulnerability and discomfort to advance knowledge, and negotiating risks of legitimacy and transcending disciplinary boundaries. Based on critical reflections from the research team, the findings call attention to the politics of knowledge production, the internal and external obstacles, and the open mindedness and emotional sensitivity necessary for interdisciplinary qualitative research. Emphasis is placed on relational and structural processes and mechanisms to negotiate these challenges and the potential for interdisciplinary research to enhance the significance of scholarly work.

Keywords

emotion, feminist, interdisciplinary research, leisure, motherhood, policy, politics of knowledge production, qualitative research

What is already known?

The benefits of interdisciplinary research to solve complex problems and integrate knowledge are well-documented in the literature. Scholars emphasize the importance of engaging in interdisciplinary research in order to reflect and even restructure a changing social life. Through an interdisciplinary approach, qualitative research expands disciplinary boundaries that exist between fields of social inquiry and, consequently, the underpinnings of the very creation of knowledge. The value of interdisciplinary research has received increased attention among funding agencies and university administrators.

What this paper adds?

The purpose of this study is to advance insights on the interdisciplinary research process as experienced by the researcher. The findings call attention to the politics of knowledge production, the internal and external obstacles, and the open mindedness and emotional sensitivity necessary for interdisciplinary qualitative research. Relational and structural processes and mechanisms to negotiate these challenges and the potential for interdisciplinary research to enhance the significance of scholarly work are put forth.

In recent years, the interdisciplinary "buzz" has received increasing attention among funding agencies and university administrators (Anders & Lester, 2015; Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2016; Kitch, 2007; McCallin, 2006). Its inherent value is assumed in its ability to solve complex problems and integrate knowledge that individual disciplines cannot solve alone (Jacobs & Frickel, 2009). To this end, leading scholars in multiple fields of study have called for moving away from multidisciplinary or monodisciplinary research that characterizes much of the scholarship (Lasswell, 1951; Mair, 2006; Poteete, Janssen & Ostrom, 2010). Instead, scholars emphasize the importance of engaging in interdisciplinary research in order to reflect and even restructure a changing social life.

There are many scholarly debates concerning the meaning of interdisciplinary research (from multidisciplinary or cross-disciplinarily to interdisciplinary–pluridisciplinary–

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transdisciplinary); however, its *potential* to rejuvenate disciplinary knowledge is undeniable (for more detail, see Jacobs & Frickel, 2009; Kitch, 2007; Klein, 2013). Through an interdisciplinary approach, qualitative research has the potential to reimagine and expand the disciplinary boundaries that exist between fields of social inquiry and, consequently, the underpinnings of the very creation of knowledge.

Doing interdisciplinary qualitative research is rewarding, yet, is fraught with ongoing challenges and limitations (Anders & Lester, 2015). Specifically, as MacCleave (2006) indicates, frustrations occur owing to, "the extent to which different disciplines have their own way of doing things; deeply embedded ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions; and different specialized languages. Some of these differences might be incommensurable" (p. 40). This may provide some explanation for the scarcity of interdisciplinary research (McCallin, 2006), particularly in the social sciences (Woolley, Sánchez-Barrioluengo, Turpin, & Marceau, 2015).

While the benefits of interdisciplinary research are well-documented in the literature, minimal attention has been given to the analysis of actual interdisciplinary experiences. It is through a critical understanding of the issues that arise when doing interdisciplinary research that possibilities for new knowledge exist (Kane & Perry, 2016; MacCleave, 2006). To understand the paradoxical tensions within interdisciplinary research (i.e., benefits as well as risks and discomfort), Groen and Hyland-Russell (2016) highlight the importance of paying attention to relationship building within the research team as well as transparency and attention to the research process. With this in mind, the aim of this study is to advance insights on the interdisciplinary research process as experienced by the researchers. Specifically, we interrogate our experiences as an interdisciplinary research team that has worked together for over 5 years, beginning with the grant writing process through to qualitative data collection, analysis, representation, and dissemination.

Throughout the reflexive and analytical process, we demonstrate the significance of understanding "our negotiations, not only with one another as particularly positioned individuals but also with the ideological and organizational forces structuring our scholarly worlds" (Lingard, Schryer, Spafford, & Campbell, 2007, p. 503). The thematic highlights that emerged from this study advance understanding of the interdisciplinary research process as experienced by the researcher and make several contributions to the literature. Based on critical reflections from the research team, the findings call attention to the significance of the politics of knowledge production, the internal and external obstacles, and the open mindedness and emotional sensitivity necessary for interdisciplinary qualitative research. Emphasis is placed on relational and structural processes and mechanisms to negotiate these challenges and the potential for interdisciplinary research to enhance the significance of scholarly work.

We first offer an overview of our interdisciplinary qualitative research project, followed by a discussion of the thematic highlights on the experiences of doing interdisciplinary qualitative research.

Our Project

Background: The Politics of Leisure in the Transition to Motherhood

The project explored the nexus of public policy and leisure for women as they experience the transition to motherhood as first-time mothers (i.e., from the time women start thinking about having a child to the time the child is born/adopted and beyond). Although feminist political philosophers and political economists have explored the implication of motherhood for gendering citizens (see, e.g., Jenson, 1986; Lister, 2007; Skocpol, 1996; Young, 1984), the transition to motherhood is poorly understood. Yet, it is widely acknowledged that this transition is a life-changing period for women and their partners, which results in shifting relationships between women and their families, employers, communities, and the state. Furthermore, the policy framework surrounding motherhood is complex and implicates all levels of government, employers, and civil-society organizations. Many of these policies are aimed at facilitating labor market attachment (see, e.g., Kershaw, 2008; Pulkingham & Van der Gaag, 2004; Vosko, 2000).

Equally important, yet often absent from policy analysis, is the role of leisure in this transition, since leisure can have a positive impact on individuals, families, and communities and result in increased well-being, family cohesiveness, social support, and community engagement (see, e.g., Hebblethwaite & Norris, 2011; Iwasaki, Mactavish, & Mackay, 2005; Palmer, Freeman, & Zabriskie, 2007). At the same time, despite numerous benefits associated with leisure, experiencing these impacts and achieving the right to leisure is increasingly challenging for new mothers (see, e.g., Agate, 2010; Hilbrecht, 2013; Shaw, 2010; Sullivan, 2013). Although feminist leisure scholars have explored the implications for motherhood on their leisure experiences, its relation to public policy is understudied. By exploring the relationship between women, leisure, and the state and its impact on mothers' well-being, we aim to broaden the policy lens and expand the investigation theoretically and methodologically to more fully understand the lived experience of the transition to motherhood.

Through this multifaceted study, we engaged in several phases of data collection. The first stage entailed an interdisciplinary review of the literature from a wide variety of disciplines including policy studies, leisure studies, women's studies, psychology, sociology, and beyond. The second stage involved the use of policy mapping, which is a method commonly used in policy studies (yet virtually unused within leisure studies in North America) that seeks to expose all of the policies relevant to a particular area at all levels of government. The third stage focused on the use of narrative inquiry to understand the lived experience of the transition to motherhood for 10 mothers in Toronto and Montreal,

Canada. Although qualitative research has a rich body of scholarship in leisure studies, traditional approaches that focus on a "top-down" process and/or quantitative "scientific" settings privilege the field of policy studies. This project allowed us to combine our individual areas of expertise in order to explore the transition to motherhood in an interdisciplinary way.

Background: Our Research Team

We are three scholars (Dawn, Stephanie, and Shannon) and two graduate students (Trisha and Meredith) from diverse backgrounds at two publicly funded universities in Canada. Although from different fields of study (i.e., Recreation and Leisure Studies, Political Science, Family Relations) as well as theoretical perspectives (i.e., constructivist, critical, and post-structuralist), we identify our intellectual autobiographies as cisgendered, heterosexual, and able-bodied women who, as feminists, start from privileged positions of power (academically and personally). In turn, our intellectual autobiographies and research goals are well aligned for an interdisciplinary approach to knowledge building. Indeed, Kitch (2007) posits that "feminist political and epistemological goals can be best achieved through integrative and reciprocal interdisciplinarity" (p. 131). Transcending interdisciplinary constraints are necessary to confront and challenge gender issues, while avoiding the oversimplified universalization of women's lives (Kitch, 2007).

We had regular, ongoing meetings throughout the project's duration, with virtual weekly or biweekly meetings scheduled for an hour and a half. The team met in-person twice a year for 2-day research retreats.[1] Interim communications via e-mail were conducted on a regular basis. Similar to Guyotte and Sochacka (2016), the concept for this article came by accident through an organic process after our first 2-day retreat. It was at this retreat that our vulnerabilities, insecurities, and negotiations with each other as well as awareness of the ideological and organizational forces that constrained our work were raised. After this initial retreat, we had ongoing dialogue about these issues over the course of 6 months. At a subsequent research retreat, we facilitated a 4-hr workshop in which we interrogated the challenges and risks of our interdisciplinary research project and team dynamics. At this workshop, our conversation was audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim for further examination.

The consequent personal and team reflection and analysis of our ongoing dialogue led to the emergence of three central issues that we continue to navigate and negotiate. The three issues we faced were centered on constructing a common language and developing research synergies, embracing vulnerability and discomfort to advance knowledge, and negotiating risks of legitimacy and transcending disciplinary boundaries. Following a discussion of these central issues, we provide strategies (relational and structural) that helped us negotiate the challenges and risks that we confronted.

Similar to Lingard, Schryer, Spafford, and Campbell (2007), we "intend this article to be multivocal, to evoke rather than elide the complexity of our team dynamic" (p. 503) and "destabilize the traditional identity of the "author" (p. 513). Aligned with diverse forms of representation found in qualitative inquiry, we also sought creative ways to represent our critical reflections and analysis. Toward this end, our article is framed by personal narratives from each of the five authors that are represented in the form of vignettes. These vignettes illustrate the complexity and intersectionality of the issues and risks that we confronted as well as strategies employed to help negotiate the challenges.

Thematic Highlights on the Experiences of Interdisciplinary Research

I'm in Over My Head (by Shannon Hebblethwaite)

I dash out of my office in a frantic effort to catch the next train home, so I'll make it in time for our weekly Skype meeting. Yet another day of my dad's favorite expression: "Kick the alligator closest to the boat and row on." I collapse into a seat on the train and start to fret. "Will I have anything useful to contribute to tonight's discussion?" I should have prepared more. I wonder where I'll find the extra time it takes to get up to speed on a whole new discipline, a whole new literature.

I've taken the lead on writing the integrative review article and I alternate between intrigue and terror when I think about the work that's involved. The sheer number of disciplines and applied fields of study that we reviewed (19 in all!). But it will be worth it in the end, won't it? We are so dialed in to this neoliberal agenda in academe related to publishing—and doing so very quickly. It's a lot easier when you can just rhyme off the literature and the sources from your own respective discipline/applied field of study. It might have been faster if we had separated out the areas and took the lead on the ones we were most familiar with.

And yet, reaching out of my comfort zone is what is helping me to learn and grow. But it's a challenge when your time lines are tight and you're constantly accountable for your productivity. Where does "taking time to read and learn" get counted??? It's been a 4-year journey and I'm still negotiating these tensions. What began as a cool idea in a coffee shop with Stephanie one rainy afternoon required countless pots of coffee as we formulated the grant application and brought the project to fruition. It's been an ongoing challenge bringing our puzzle pieces together and finding coherence epistemologically, theoretically, and methodologically. Indeed, I suspect that in part, this is why it took three grant applications before we were finally successful. Thankfully, we were all committed to this research idea and did not give up hope on its potential.

As I lie awake for yet another restless night, my head swims with all we want to accomplish and how much we still have to learn. I have to trust that my co-researchers have my back and that, together, we'll be able to contribute in new and innovative ways because of our collaboration.

Constructing Shared Understanding and Developing Research Synergies

Shannon's vignette highlights the challenges of constructing shared understanding and developing research synergies. Significant to this challenge was the concept of time and intentionality, and this was salient throughout all phases of the project from grant writing to knowledge translation. For example, while writing the grant proposal, we wondered how Stephanie's political science peer reviewers would accept our plan to destabilize traditional methods of knowledge construction within the discipline. Moreover, we feared how they would receive the concept of leisure within a discipline that tends to conceptualize well-being along economic dimensions. Indeed, our fears were warranted as "interdisciplinary research proposals have been demonstrated to have consistently lower funding success (Bromham et al., 2016) and this may in part be due to disciplinary biases and reduced comfort of grant assessors in evaluating interdisciplinary projects" (Bark, Kragt, & Robson, 2016, p. 1457).

Yet, there are indicators that funders have recognized some of these unique challenges that researchers who take on novel research approaches encounter. In 2014, for example, a new federal grant program was announced by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada: Insight Development Grants. "The grants enable the development of new research questions, as well as experimentation with new methods, theoretical approaches and/or ideas" (www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca). It was through this new initiative by the federal government that our application was eventually successful.

The collaborative processes that we navigated and the time it took to see the research problem through a "new lens" required a greater sense of commitment and collaboration than we were accustomed to within our own areas of study. It was clear, too, that time and a commitment to the process of unpacking disciplinary bias and jargon was necessary for developing research synergies. That is, we intentionally had to break down constructs and assumptions through ongoing reflective conversations to understand the meanings embedded within them. McCallin (2006) cautions that this is an issue for interdisciplinary research: "a team cannot assume that all members share a common understanding about the nature of science, definitions of the research problem, or the design" (p. 91).

With the realization of the simultaneous yet sometimes misunderstood disciplinary conversations that could occur, we created the space for intentional dialogue with the aim of constructing shared understanding and breaking down disciplinary jargon. This included the diverse meanings that emerged from familiar terms to both areas of study and the assumptions that were discipline specific. What was inherent and essential to this process was the willingness of team members to engage in this process; without it, we believed it would create contexts for misinterpretation and misunderstanding.

For example, while Dawn and Shannon would have never identified as postpositivists epistemologically, we came to learn that within the political science realm, our work might have been identified as such. As Stephanie explained, within her discipline that often privileges a top-down process and/or quantitative work, postpositivism is associated with those approaches that question and challenge the subjugation of politics to knowledge by troubling the "objective" bases of positivism and recentering subjectivity in understanding the world around us (Fischer, 2003). In contrast, within Dawn and Shannon's areas of study, framing critical work that seeks to break down, challenge, and change social structures "as post-positivist misrepresents the paradigm and accompanying philosophical positions that underpin our scholarship" (Parry, Johnson, & Stewart, 2013, p. 82).

As Dawn has previously argued (Trussell, 2014), there are inherent risks when stepping outside of our normative disciplinary boundaries related to data collection, analysis, and representation—and it is particularly risky for junior scholars (Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2016). This is compounded by what Pedlar (1999) refers to as *efficiency*, wherein we are most likely to cite specialists who work in similar areas of investigation to our own. To go outside of our familiar literature and learn new bodies of work may slow down or impede our quest for publications. As we have found, this challenge is particularly heightened in our interdisciplinary team relative to other research teams with which we have worked. For example, even during the latter phases of the project, the discomfort when writing outside of our traditional areas of expertise would require additional time and effort. Yet, through the intentional dialogue of unpacking jargon and disciplinary assumptions, we found research synergies. By being open to a sense of discovery and novel ways to construct and represent meaning, we believe that new insights have been garnered in a way that we would have never imagined possible had we remained in our disciplinary silos.

Confessions of an Imposter (by Dawn E. Trussell). I hit the disconnect button and sit back in my office chair feeling unsettled from today's meeting. With a deep sigh, I glance over at the Policy Primer book that Stephanie sent each team member, and I wonder if she questions the contributions that I make to the team. It has been many years—perhaps since my master's research—that I have felt this incompetent. I have a strong interest in researcher identities as well as ethical complexities in the research process and have published several articles in this area. Indeed, the thought of learning new ways of constructing knowledge was one of the things that I was most excited about for this project at its onset. However, the realities of navigating unfamiliar terrain with this policy mapping method combined with my lack of substantive knowledge in the area of policy studies leaves me feeling like an imposter.

I think back to the previous week when I confessed to Trisha with much hesitation that this was unchartered terrain for me. But as her doctoral advisor, am I not supposed to be guiding her training? How can I be an expert when I am questioning the value of my own contributions? Is she starting to question my expertise—and my fit as her advisor? I feel like I need to come clean with Shannon and Stephanie as I continue to fake my way through our policy-mapping meetings, but my insecurity and

vulnerability about how they will react to such admissions keeps me silent.

My thoughts drift to how we are structuring the project. With looming deadlines as well as grant accountabilities, would it not make more sense for us to divide up the work into our areas of expertise for the data collection and analysis? Perhaps Stephanie should work independently on the policy-mapping piece while Shannon and I work on the narrative analysis. Would this not be more productive? I yearn to feel a sense of competence once again. Feeling overwhelmed, I take a deep breath, open up the Policy Primer book, and try to figure out what I'm supposed to do next.

Embracing Vulnerability and Discomfort to Advance Knowledge

As represented in the vignette written by Dawn, at times we found our own emotionality to be overwhelming as each of us, independently, questioned the value of our contributions to the project. Several scholars such as Dupuis (1999), Johnson (2009), and Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, and Liamputtong (2009) have emphasized the significance of understanding our human selves in the research process, while embracing emotions and multiple identities; yet, these calls to action are made within the context of research participants. Upon reflection, we also believe that emotional difficulties encountered *within* the research team are also salient.

Issues of vulnerability and insecurity when working outside of our disciplinary boundaries were compelling to each one of our narratives. The significance of these emotions, and how they influenced the contributions and work context of each researcher, became largely evident during our first 2-day research retreat. It was at this juncture that we began to open up and "confess" our insecurities when experiencing discomfort. It was clear, too, that the opportunity to open up dialogue was a liberating experience for all team members as we shared similar experiences that we had, at earlier stages, kept "hidden" from each other. Through this process of self-awareness came the ability to reframe our notion of being an imposter or an expert and to question our fields of study norms and assumptions and how we came to understand and examine our social worlds.

Aligned with our reflections, Bruhn (2000) argues that researchers like to reproduce the methods they learned in their training and points to the dangers "of script-based thinking, upon which most research is based. Script-based research is what we do without thinking too hard about how we will do it—it becomes routine and repetitive. The method stays the same, only the problem changes" (p. 64). Working in an interdisciplinary team forced us to break out of our script-based thinking that was inherently embedded within our respective areas of study. As we found, doing so came with the cost of feeling vulnerable, at times incompetent, as well as unsure of our individual contributions to the collective team. Consequently, we had to be willing to let go of being experts during the construction of knowledge and become a "community of

learners" (MacCleave, 2006, p. 51). Similar to Lingard et al. (2007), we had to accept feeling uprooted, alien, frustrated, and as though we did not "really" belong. We also believe that the solution

> is not to avoid these feelings, however, for if they are made explicit and engaged by the interdisciplinary research team, they can result in critical breakthroughs . . . [and, in turn, produce] knowledge that challenges the disciplinary structures of each member's professional field. (Lingard et al., 2007, p. 506)

Thus, by embracing our vulnerabilities and discomfort, and stepping away from 'script-based research', it furthered our development and growth as scholars. A critical piece of this transition was to not only recognize our own emotionality during the research process, but also to intentionally understand the positionality of our team members, in order to build a supportive community of learners.

"Well, that's one project I'll have to keep off my CV!" (by Stephanie Paterson). I looked at each of their faces on the computer screen, waiting for them to tell me they were joking. When I realized they were serious, I had a sinking feeling in my stomach and thought, "This is going to ruin my credibility." We were discussing using an arts-based approach to translate our findings. Although I joked about career suicide, I was actually thinking strategically about how to hide this work from my colleagues. After all, I work in a discipline where, as a feminist and critical scholar, I'm already outside of the mainstream. With the increasing quantification of political science and policy studies, this is not the sort of thing on which one gets promoted. In those next few moments, I imagined myself going up for full professor and having to face questions about the integrity of the project. In my head, I could hear certain colleagues snickering and asking if I were serious.

After saying goodbye to the team that night, I remained at my desk for a while, reflecting on the project. Why was my reaction so harsh? The decision to use arts-based research was not a surprise. Indeed, this is what we had discussed as we were preparing the grant application. And I am—or so I thought—a huge supporter of arts-based approaches and their radical potential to transform academe. Most importantly, I am excited about the work we are doing and about learning and applying new approaches and methodologies. In my own work, I aim to critique and push back against positivism and disciplinary boundaries; using an arts-based approach is a logical extension of that. But as I sat there fiddling with the ever-growing pile of articles in front of me, something was unsettling.

As days went by, I realized that my reaction was not so much about the project, but about my insecurities as an academic. Since that initial meeting, I found myself engaging reflexively about what it means to be an academic, what we should be doing and how we communicate. In doing so, I realized that there is a big gulf between the scholar I want to be and the scholar I am. I want to be the type of scholar who democratizes academe by speaking plain language, transcending

disciplinary boundaries, and asking critical questions about who and what we hear, as well as who gets to speak, what is said and how. But the scholar I am right now is having a hard time breaking out of my own disciplinary "constraints," a term I chose very deliberately, as I struggle with what at times feels . . . , well, . . . unscholarly. Ultimately, this project is, I hope, helping me become the scholar I want to be. But it is definitely a work in progress.

Negotiating Risks of Legitimacy and Transcending Disciplinary Boundaries

Stephanie's vignette highlights the challenges we experienced in negotiating risks of legitimacy and challenging disciplinary boundaries. This is related to what Lingard et al. (2007) refer to as academic "value" and writing customs. The writing process may be the most contentious component in qualitative research teams (Liggett et al., 1994 as cited in Lingard et al., 2007), and based upon our experiences, we believe it may be particularly relevant to interdisciplinary teams. In this project, the idea of presenting our work in novel and creative interpretative methods was inherently contradictory. We were excited to transcend disciplinary boundaries with new forms of representation (as constructed through shared understanding and developing research synergies). Yet, at the same time, it was an uncomfortable space to imagine how these new and novel approaches would be received within our home disciplines. (Even the process of writing vignettes for the development of this manuscript was an uncomfortable yet an exciting and novel terrain for Stephanie.)

As Stephanie explained at our retreat, It's hard. In fact, I contemplated: "Should I leave this off my CV because it will count for nothing and perhaps even work against me in the performance evaluations?" The decision to collectively move forward with some of the conference presentations and manuscripts framed by arts-based representations was not a light one. It affected all team members. Even with the decision to go ahead, everyone was mindful of the potential impact that these collective decisions might have on each other's long-term career development. As Shannon simply wrote during the research retreat, "Will Stephanie *forgive* me?"

As Shinn (2006) warns, the external rather than internal challenges may pose the greatest risks to interdisciplinary research teams. For example, as Stephanie has made clear, there may be roadblocks from her disciplinary colleagues who wonder what our work has to do with their discipline, why she publishes in odd journals, and why she does "applied" work. All of these value-based constraints influenced our team's decision-making process and weighed heavily on our minds. This conflict with external pressures is aligned with what Leavy (2011) refers to as reinforcing, even if unintentionally, disciplinary boundaries and "what professional activities are appropriate and what type of knowledge will be recognized and valued" (p. 17).

We have also encountered structural difficulties when writing grant applications and manuscripts. For example, traditional word/page limits have presented difficulties while constructing newfound knowledge that is represented by diverse and vast bodies of literature as well as "novel" methodologies to our respective fields of study. Others such as Spiller et al. (2015) have warned of the publishing challenges in prestigious academic outlets:

> The wide body of literature is deemed a weakness. Instead, we are asked to narrow the scope, while exploring discipline-specific topics in more depth. The terminology becomes another issue. We need to adapt terms that are familiar to the audience of the target journal, even if they fail to capture the full breadth of what we are talking about. (p. 11)

Indeed, during our decision-making process related to the politics of knowledge production, we became very mindful of our diverse homes within the academy and constantly imagined how peer-reviewers would demand "identification with particular concepts, approaches, and methodologies" (Anders & Lester, 2015, p. 6). It was at this time that we would have to (re)evaluate what had historically motivated our publication decisions based upon what Lingard et al. (2007) refers to as disciplinary capital. Moreover, these decisions weighed heavy with the possibility of fracturing the research synergies that we had worked so hard to construct. To this end, this challenge remains unresolved.

Feeling Like I'm Really Part of a Team (by Trisha M. K. Xing). I close my laptop after one of our weekly Skype meetings and lean back in my desk chair. Reflecting upon the last year and a half that we have been working on this project, I can't help but feel very pleased with how well we have made this work. "This," being working on an interdisciplinary research team. Five women, three professors, two research assistants, two disciplines. Each of us located in different cities in two different provinces. Skype has been one of our most important tools for staying connected and moving the project along at a productive pace, particularly since it would physically be impossible for us to meet this regularly without it.

However, as I sip my green tea with lemon and honey, I reflect on what has shaped our success so far. To me, our success is grounded in the relational aspects of our team. We are not just research colleagues. Neither are we dichotomized as professors versus research assistants. We have managed to balance professionalism and friendship. And that is no exaggeration—it's the honest truth. There is so much that I appreciate about the ways in which we collaborate. We have fostered an environment that emphasizes understanding while respecting our differences—our differing academic backgrounds, research philosophies, and life experiences. Each of these is celebrated and drawn upon as means to enrich the ways we think about conducting and analyzing our study.

Through weekend long retreats, we have worked through a process of personal and professional reflection that created and developed a sense of openness. Through that, we have cultivated a sense of trust that opens up space for being honest and vulnerable with each other about things that we are unsure about or uncomfortable with. This is particularly important, as

we have each confessed to feeling incompetent working in and with a new discipline, methodology, or philosophy. We have made space to let go of being the expert at the same time, as we trust in each other as colleagues who are experts in our respective fields. We have committed to spending the time to massage these relational aspects of our work together, as an essential tool to stay connected and move the project along.

As I close my blue spiral Hilroy notebook and place it back on my bookshelf, I realize that I look forward to our Skype meetings every week. As much as I love the research we are doing, I equally enjoy the relationships and friendships we have developed along the way.

Developing Relational Strategies and Building Trust

As Trisha's vignette makes clear, relational strategies helped us negotiate the challenges and risks that we confronted. Specifically, principles of social trust, respecting different worldviews, and compassion (Bruhn, 2000) were instrumental for team members to feel *safe to admit when we didn't know*. In our experience to date, this parallels the feminist principles underlying our epistemological orientations and working relationships, which include identifying and minimizing hierarchies within our research relationships, acknowledging situated and experiential knowledge both within and outside of our team, and engaging reflexively in the research process and its outcomes (Harding, 1987).

Creating a safe space required sustained effort, continuous reflection, deep listening, and suspension of personal views; it was a time-consuming endeavor for all team members (Lingard et al., 2007; MacCleave, 2006; McCallin, 2006; Spiller et al., 2015). That is, although relational aspects took time to develop, we began to feel comfortable sharing honest reflections on our work. Throughout this process, we were conscious of using "I" statements when we presented our viewpoints. This opened space for others to agree or disagree and present their own interpretations. As socialized and particularly positioned individuals (Harding, 1991), early in the research project, we also came to realize the importance of deconstructing our own diverse values and perspectives related to motherhood to create a safe space for open dialogue (e.g., not all of us are and/or intend to become mothers and we have diverse personal experiences related to the transition to motherhood). Making space for diverse viewpoints was a time-consuming endeavor, but resulted in a more nuanced understanding of the transition to motherhood than we would have come to through working in our disciplinary silos.

Upon reflection, we have come to realize that the "courage to challenge the self and willingness to contribute to team learning" (McCallin, 2006, p. 89) was essential in negotiating the issues we encountered. In our interdisciplinary team, sharing knowledge and coaching each other were important aspects of fostering an environment in which we learned together (Holland, 2004; McCallin, 2006). We had to develop trust in the other team members' competence and their abilities to guide us through unfamiliar terrain. Similar to Groen and Hyland-

Russell's (2016) trust became the foundation of our relationship. Moreover, in creating a collective learning community, we recognized the significance of humor to convey our vulnerabilities, acquire new ways of thinking, and cultivate our working relationships.

Our team worked hard to ensure that everyone had a voice that was given equal weight in our discussions. We (Dawn, Stephanie, and Shannon) began, very consciously, asking Trisha and Meredith (research assistants) for their insights and feedback. As feminist scholars, it was important for us to make a concerted effort to minimize hierarchies in our research relationships. This is often reflected upon with respect to the relationship between the researcher and the research participant (see, e.g., Thompson, 1992), and it was equally important *among* the research team members. In addition to identifying and minimizing hierarchies, we have appreciated our individual "stand points" and take reflexivity very seriously. In our weekly meetings and semiannual retreats, we worked to examine the assumptions underlying our claims, both as individuals and as a team.

Charting Our Work and Being Accountable to Each Other (by Meredith Evans). I open my agenda and am reminded of this week's to-dos, a neat list that sets out my objectives for this week. In the early stages of the project, at a team retreat, we spent an afternoon establishing a time line. With bristol board and magic markers, our goals for conferences and articles were penciled in, key milestones were highlighted, and we built a structured and forward looking map. This broad overview let us take a step back, look at commitments, and plan our priorities accordingly. To meet our time line, we hold weekly meetings structured by an agenda that includes time to cover general items and to hash out our main objective for the week. The meeting is our regular time to engage in constructive and effective communication.

Working with an interdisciplinary team is about working collaboratively but is also about dividing and sharing the workload. Fairness is one of our team's values and principles—we share the workload and the credit. Every week, we establish objectives for the next, so we know what is expected of each of us. These weekly objectives create a sense of accountability. We are accountable to each other and to the project. The schedule does not always go as planned, but as a team, we support each other and keep moving forward.

As I reflect on my long to-do list for this week, wondering how to fit it in, I know my team is doing the same. So I take a breath, plan the next few days, and keep our goals in sight.

Using Structural Strategies to Negotiate and Navigate Ongoing Challenges

As Meredith's vignette highlights, structural strategies helped us navigate the challenges that we encountered. Strategies such as intentionally meeting weekly or biweekly kept us on track by having concrete tasks to accomplish. Assigning responsibilities that were clearly determined in advance, in preparation for the

meeting as well as predetermined roles within the meeting, also helped to keep us on task and on time. We believe that this helped foster a high level of accountability and trust within our working relationship.

It was clear, too, that having (bi)weekly contact as a team helped to strengthen the relational aspects, as Trisha's vignette outlined. We now understand that regular, ongoing meetings inhibited our ongoing vulnerabilities and discomfort from festering (as Shannon, Dawn, and Stephanie's vignettes illustrate). That is, through regular contact, we were accountable to our team members, and this required action regardless of our insecurities. It also speaks to the significance of continuous discussion to help negotiate any existing individual and team uncertainties as well as to develop synergistic interdisciplinary working relationships.

Aligned with the underpinnings of good qualitative interpretative research, through the process of ongoing reflexivity (e.g., Glesne, 2011; Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014), we intentionally created moments of dialogue to express our challenges related to the research project. We believe that the semiannual research retreats were essential to this process. Creating structure, time, and an intentional space for individual as well as group reflexivity was a key component of what we believe to be our success. Spiller et al. (2015) refer to this as the creation of a "research sanctuary" (p. 11) whereby collective sense-making can occur that shuts out external ideological and organizational forces structuring our scholarly worlds. It was through these 2-day retreats that we were able to engage in deep listening and reflective practice—in a way that short (bi)weekly meetings were unable to facilitate. Thus, relational and structural processes and strategies were essential in helping us negotiate and navigate our ongoing challenges related to an interdisciplinary qualitative research team.

Final Reflections

The thematic highlights that emerged from this study emphasize the importance of understanding the interdisciplinary research process as experienced by the researcher and make several contributions to the literature. We show that obstacles to interdisciplinary research are both internal and external, in that, many of the challenges relate to our own deeply internalized ideas about what constitutes legitimate research as well as concerns about peers' perceptions of nonconventional scholarship. At the same time, other challenges may be structural and emphasize the importance of academic reward systems that are based on excellence in a single discipline. These structural challenges and constructed culture belie the resounding call within universities as well as funding agencies to "engage in research across the disciplines" and it is "our academic peers, including each of us, within our respective disciplines who act as gatekeepers" (Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2016, p. 815–816).

The researcher reflections and analysis from this article also highlight the process of engaging in long-term, structured interdisciplinary research activities that stretch scholars' boundaries and offer possibilities for enhancing the significance of scholarly work. By advancing insights on the interdisciplinary research process as experienced by the researchers, we demonstrate the need for open mindedness and emotional sensitivity, including deliberate relationship-building and structured approaches to mutual responsibility for research outcomes. In framing these insights, we also present some practical strategies such as regularly scheduled meetings and semiannual research retreats that held us accountable to the research project goals and each other.

This study served to emphasize the importance of understanding the context of *time* as a salient challenge within an interdisciplinary research team. That is, embedded throughout all of our narratives was the heightened sense of time and effort required to construct shared understanding and develop qualitative research synergies, embrace our vulnerability and discomfort, and navigate the risks of legitimacy when transcending disciplinary boundaries. The structural and relational strategies of developing and nurturing research team relationships to address these challenges were also bounded by aspects of time. Because of time management issues, McCallin (2006, citing Gaskill et al., 2003) ascertains many research collaborations are single-discipline projects.

Further, all of our narratives illustrate the multidimensional nature of research challenges. For example, the challenges associated with constructing shared understanding and developing research synergies (Shannon's vignette) also speaks to the significance of the emotionality of these processes and moments of vulnerability and discomfort found therein (Dawn and Stephanie's vignettes). It also highlights that our "emotional and cognitive functions as [researchers are] inseparable from each other and that emotions should be central to the research process" (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009, p. 64). The internal pressures to succeed (e.g., vulnerability and emotionality *within* the research team) were also interconnected with external pressures (e.g., issues of representation, legitimacy, and academic value outside of the research team). However, through building constructive, positive, and trusting relationships (Trisha's vignette) and structural strategies that emphasized ongoing contact, goal setting, and accountability (Meredith's vignette), we were able to facilitate collective learning that helped us acquire new knowledge and transcend disciplinary constraints (McCallin, 2006).

Finally, despite the documented difficulties, we argue that in many ways being able to openly name and confront the challenges and risks has strengthened our research relationship and, in turn, the very creation of knowledge through qualitative research methods. The self-awareness and humility of experiencing vulnerability and discomfort paradoxically enables us to enjoy new theoretical outlooks, harmonize writing styles, and distance ourselves from our disciplinary silos. Spiller et al. (2015) refer to this as the process of "letting go," when a research team seeks "new, hybrid, and cohesive ways to root our research" (p. 9). Through our self-reflective journey, we have gained confidence in our research synergies and writing. This article represents how we have come to honor our

individual perspectives and foundational beginnings, while simultaneously engaging in interdisciplinary interpretations and representations that take risks, and we believe transcends disciplinary boundaries.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Note

1. When possible team members were present in-person at the 2-day retreats. However, for logistical reasons, one team member would attend through virtual communication.

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