

Negotiating Ourselves:

Navigating Paradigmatic Conflict and Diverse Identities in Collaborative Qualitative Research

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Introduction

Large-scale, externally-funded qualitative research has become increasingly common. At this scale, qualitative research often requires multiple researchers engaged in the collection, management, and analysis of qualitative data. Although numerous scholars have critically examined issues surrounding individual researcher positionality in qualitative inquiry, fewer have addressed or provided specific guidance on negotiating diverse positionalities within larger team-based research projects – particularly those that are hierarchical in nature.

Literature Review

The Research Project

Our Group Reflexive Process: A Four Stage Foundation

What Emerged From Our Reflexive Process

Next Steps



Literature Review

Extend increasing body of scholarship on the benefits, challenges and ways of doing collaborative qualitative research relative to team reflexivity

“Where research is done as a team activity the opportunities for critical reflexivity are multiplied” (Barry, 2013, p. 214)

Liggett et al. (1994) were among the first to propose the use of reflexivity to optimize teamwork in qualitative research

Additional scholarship has since extended this work to include more practical tools that assist teams in carrying out reflexive practices at varying stages of the research process (Barry et al., 1999; Siltanen et al., 2008) – often focusing upon collaborative meaning-making (Paulus et al., 2010) in the “interpretive zone” (Wasser & Bresler, 1996) or working through team member assumptions as they enter and exit the field (Hughes & Willink, 2014)

However, little to no scholarship explicitly unites the “how to” of team reflexivity relative to team hierarchical structures



The WREA Project and Team

A multisite, multidisciplinary, mixed-methods project funded by the National Science Foundation exploring geographic inequality of opportunity relative to work-related educational activities (e.g., internships or co-ops)

Team Structure:

- Higher education researchers
 - Quantitative duo (PI and GRA)
 - Qual team (the presenters; co-PI, two GRAs, and a master's student)
- Geography team
 - Two professors
 - One GRA



Our Group Reflexive Process

Setting a Foundation for Continued Reflexivity



A Four Stage Foundation

1. Individual reflections
2. Responding to each other
3. Reflecting on responses
4. A larger group discussion



Stage 1: Individual Reflections

Questions from Barry et al. (1999):

- “In what way might my experience color my participation in the project?”
- What experience have I had with qualitative research?
- What is my orientation to qualitative research?
- What results do I expect to come out of this project?
- What theoretical lens do I favor to apply to the results?
- What is my stake in the research? What do I hope to get out of it?
- What are my fears?” (p. 35)

Our additions:

- What is the purpose of reflexivity?
- Why do you think you’re a member of the team?
- What do you think you add to the team?
- How do your experiences/views extend the research team's understanding?



Stage 2: Responding to each other

- Read each person's responses to the questions posed by Barry et al. (1999) and our additions.
 - Pay special attention to our added questions.
 - Think about the person's responses.
 - How do the responses conflict or align with your own thoughts/experiences?
 - How do they expand your thinking about the project? About the person?
 - Are there questions that you have?
- Provide written questions/feedback.
- Take some individual notes.
 - Consider what themes emerge amongst our responses.
 - Where is there dissonance and consonance?



Stage 3: Reflecting on Responses

- Review the responses/questions made on your individual reflexivity responses.
- Consider preparing responses to questions posed.
- Take some individual notes.
 - What are your thoughts?
 - What challenges you?
 - How do the responses change your perspective?
 - Did people misunderstand you?
- Prepare questions and comments for the group based upon your individual responses, the responses of the team members, and the feedback/questions provided on your responses.



Stage 4: A Larger Group Discussion

1. Provide space for clarifications about responses.
2. Discuss the themes which emerged in our responses.
 - a. How do these shape our group norms?
 - b. How can we keep aware of these taken for granted assumptions?
3. Discuss places of dissonance.
 - a. Are these fundamental? How can we navigate those?
 - b. How do these expand our understandings?
 - c. Can we come to a better understanding?



What Emerged

- Normative Assumptions
 - Identities
 - Orientation to qualitative methods
 - Personal contributions to the field
- Hierarchy
- Group Norms
 - Individual-group-challenge



Next Steps/Conclusion

Upon later reflection, the team realized **the questions we asked of ourselves were not the right ones**; or we realized we should've asked **better questions** of ourselves.

How could we increasingly become more critical of the hierarchical structures and power dynamics at play within our team?

How do those power dynamics intersect with unique identities that we hold as researchers?

Thank You!

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