Article

Implicating Ourselves Through Our Research: A Duoethnography of Researcher Reflexivity

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Abstract

Researcher reflexivity is not a new concept in qualitative research. However, how/if researchers engage in that reflexivity varies. In this essay, the authors engage in reflexivity about a research project they conducted together. The previous project consisted of semi-structured interviews with U.S.-based mothers regarding their perceptions about motherhood. We then used intensive motherhood as a theoretical lens through which we analyzed the interviews. The project also encompassed mothers' perceptions during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Through duoethnography, the researchers reflexively consider major dead angles of their project, challenges they faced, and what reflexivity brings to the forefront. They further reflect on their own communication processes throughout the research project and discuss implications for future researchers. As a result, the authors call for researchers to consider their own positionalities and the effects on research more deeply through collaboration and continual reevaluation.

Keywords

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Introduction

As a critical and rhetorical researcher, I (Molly) felt comfortable with the notion of reflexivity as a central part of my research. As a mixed-methods researcher, I (Grace) recognize the importance of reflexivity in my work. We know reflexivity is "the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome" (Berger 2015:220). Yet, through a project we have collaborated on together, we realize that we cannot take our ability to be reflexive for granted, even while knowing the purpose behind the processes of reflexivity and the absolute importance of it. Our collaborative project consisted of semi-structured interviews with primarily white mothers across the United States and their perceptions of their successes and struggles as mothers. We thought we were already turning a critical eye on ourselves and our work to adequately recognize the ways we have influenced our project or to address the troubling weak spots we may have previously missed (e.g., that the participants were primarily white).

Imagine, then, how taken off-guard Molly was when a participant exposed the ways our interview questions directly undermined the point we were trying to make with our project. We wanted to understand mothers' perceptions of mothering, yet our questions directed participants to answer along specific, binaristic lines (how they struggle/succeed) rather than allowing participants to think more holistically about their parenting journeys. The participant highlighted for us how we (unintentionally) influenced our research by directing the questions from the beginning without leaving enough room for participants' answers to better guide us, a lesson we learned too late. Specifically, the framing of our project narrowed the experiences about motherhood and mothering that our participants could have shared. Moreover, as we re-read transcriptions to code and analyze the data, we found ourselves wanting to better participate in dialogue *with* the participants about our shared identities as mothers rather than staunchly separating ourselves as researchers from, or even over, being mothers.

In this essay, we focus on researcher reflexivity through a duoethnography to explore how we are implicated in our research, how we affected *it*, and are affected *by* it. We consider how much of what we have learned about reflexivity regarding this project has come after the writeup and had to be a deliberate effort. Reflexivity neither just happens, nor is it a fixed process to apply to a project. Rather, reflexivity requires researchers' continued, intentional efforts to uncover the layers of power and influence their positionalities have over their research projects. Through duoethnography, we engage the "iterative and empowering process" of reflexivity (Palaganas et al. 2017:426), to

bring our positionalities as researchers and mothers back into the conversation, finding places where our research benefits our participants as well as our field. We do this to note the relationship between reflexivity and our "phenomenon under study" which Berger (2015:222) claimed is not well addressed. We chose duoethnography because it is relational (Breault 2016; Gibbons and Gibbons 2016; Norris and Sawyer 2012), with a focus on dialogue as "the conversation that occurs between researchers allow[ing] them to create new meanings and interpretations of shared experiences" (Gibbons and Gibbons 2016:825). Duoethnography gives us a new avenue by which to understand ourselves and our project, reflexively considering how both affect one another.

We begin by situating the context and initial plans for our research project. Then, we explain, in more detail, the interview that called our attention to our problematic interview questions and the ways that changed our view of our project. Throughout, we have interspersed (set off by asterisks) sections of the recorded and transcribed dual interviews we conducted of/with one another to reflexively reconsider our research and findings in a duoethnographic style. We present the "raw" data to allow readers a chance to see how we were processing in the moment rather than with the polished shine of analysis only. We end by drawing connections for our own and others' future research.

The Project Begins

If we are honest, we were not really friends before our project. We were collegial colleagues, but we had not dedicated time to getting to know one another. We were essentially interested in similar issues, but our approaches were fundamentally different. After meeting though, we both felt there was potential in our partnership for getting at some of these stories we both knew were important. Through this project, we built the trust necessary to engage in duoethnography (Breault 2016; Norris and Sawyer 2012).

We met in Grace's office, brainstorming ideas for a motherhood-focused project we were beginning. We were both relatively new mothers with children under age five. We were both interested in how motherhood has changed/is changing our identities as women, partners, and academics. I, Molly, investigate intensive motherhood (Hays 1996) and wanted to frame part of the project using that lens. I, Grace, investigate how the (family) communicative environment affects specific health outcomes, so this project did not precisely fit. Yet, it was pulling at me for some reason. It might have been because I was struggling with being a sometimes solomom of two toddlers, whose partner was finishing graduate school hours away as well as a months-long international internship, while transitioning to a new job, and simply

wanting to hear others' stories, but also maybe a bit of wondering what other moms were thinking and dealing with as they navigated motherhood.

What we did not realize, however, was that COVID-19 was about to be declared a public health emergency in the United States. Our interview questions necessarily shifted to include COVID-specific questions; since our data collection began in May 2020, it would have been irresponsible to not acknowledge the processes and implications from the participants' perspectives about the COVID-19 pandemic. The major questions of our interview protocol became: "In what ways you do you feel like you're succeeding as a mother, both before COVID-19 and now during?" and "In what ways do you feel like you're struggling as a mother, both before COVID-19 and now during?" As we reviewed one another's interview transcriptions to check for accuracy and then re-read them to code, we learned just how different our interviewing styles were. For some reason, this was never a topic of conversation we discussed or explored; we never explicitly discussed our interviewing philosophies, styles/ approaches, or experiences and how those might change the information the participants shared. For instance, Grace was specifically interested in the unique situations and/or special needs of participants' families as it related to her own family experience (e.g., time spent in the NICU and mother of twins) whereas Molly was specifically interested in comparing her own struggles and successes in relationship to how the participants framed their answers.

We recruited 18 participants from across the United States who identified as mothers from private Facebook groups that focus on motherhood to which we each belonged. Although these Facebook groups are racially and geographically diverse, the participants who responded to our call were largely white. We tried reaching out to personal networks outside these Facebook groups with little success. All of this is to say these Facebook groups serve important community spaces in our personal lives, but most of the members who responded to our call for participants held similar identity categories to us. We are both white-appearing, well-educated, cis women married to cis men, and we are mothers. Given that our call for participants came during the early days of the COVID-19 lockdown, our participant pool reflected those mothers not dealing with other immediate crises (e.g., job loss, food insecurity, home insecurity, and/or domestic abuse). The participants were those with the time and emotional space to engage in research questions rather than questions of survival. In other words, the participants were largely privileged white women.

We conceptualized this as indicative of intensive motherhood (Hays 1996) as it is most directly linked to white mothers (O'Brien and Lynn 2017; Newman and Henderson 2014). Hays (1996) describes intensive motherhood as "*child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive*, and *financially expensive*" (8). As a normative discourse, intensive motherhood requires mothers to focus their physical, emotional, psychological, and

intellectual efforts on their child/ren (Sutherland 2010). Intensive motherhood thus prescribes good mother status to those mothers who live up to this unrealistic ideal. But not all mothers are equal under the discourse; straight, white, married, young, able-bodied, and affluent mothers who do not work outside the home are the target audience (Wiant Cummins and Brannon 2021; O'Brien and Lynn 2017). Falling outside any of these identity categories disallows a person from ever reaching good mother status, a label that provides security, belonging, and self-worth (Ennis 2014). The participants of our study underscored our argument that intensive motherhood was a normative discourse at play in (these primarily white) mothers' perceptions of motherhood (Wiant Cummins and Brannon 2021).

We had acknowledged our positionalities as researchers before conducting interviews. Yet, what we had missed prior to reading feedback on our work was adequate language to help explain what might have been at play in our participant group. As researchers, we know we cannot tokenize in snowball sampling to make a "diverse" sample. But it took a reviewer's words to help us name that the likely candidates for response to the timing of the call would be those with privilege enough to answer. This new acknowledgment provided the space and context to reevaluate our study's findings and implications within the scope of the larger world.

Nevertheless, the interviews could be emotional experiences. I (Molly) found myself desperate to connect with the participants not just for rapport-building before the interview questions, but for affirmation or validation that I was not the only one experiencing the struggles and loneliness of motherhood generally and in light of a pandemic. Conducting the interviews was exhausting, mostly because there was so much weight to some of the participants' stories and experiences. Coupled with my (Grace's) own toddlers occasionally screaming on the other side of my makeshift office door, I could tell my emotions were heightened during the data-collection phase. Analysis brought back some of these emotions as we found ourselves tearing up on several parts of the interviews themselves and then again re-reading notes or transcriptions. In the next section, we narrate the moment of reflexivity spurred by participant Anne.

The Eureka Moment

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Grace: So I think probably, for me, because I was not the interviewer for Anne, I did not even realize that we had been called out until we were analyzing the data and so—and that is not to say anything against, "You didn't tell me" or anything like that. But, I think that for us not having had regular conversations between interviews, even though because it was a pandemic and

because there was so much going on at that moment in time, we were just trying to get those interviews done, or at least I was.

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Throughout the data collection phase, we did check in frequently, excited about or reeling from an interview we had recently completed and hoping there were significant moments in our data that mattered to an audience outside of only ourselves. Unfortunately, we missed opportunities to actually talk about information we learned in the interview or our process during it. Then, Molly conducted an interview with participant Anne. As we neared the end of the interview, I asked Anne a final question, "Is there anything else you'd like to add about succeeding or struggling as a mom, or what it means to be a mom?" Anne replied that we need "to stop thinking about being successful or failing or any of those things." She clarified:

> I think we need to stop putting boxes on things and to really, I don't know, cultivate ourselves as parents in communities. And stop being like, "This is what success means." It just needs to go away, right? Because no one teaches you how to do this, except your kids, sort of. And people are going to do it differently. And I think to surround yourself with people who are going to make you feel good about what you're doing. It doesn't mean that they're not going to question you sometimes, but [people] that make you feel validated and supported, and you can be a better person and a better parent.

For Anne, the fact that our questions explicitly asked mothers to identify what they counted as success and struggle was part of the problem. We contributed to the normative discourse we were attempting to study by essentially asking mothers to identify how they live up to and how they fail to live up to intensive motherhood's unrealistic demands (Hays 1996). Our questions did not leave room to interrogate intensive motherhood, to ask how mothers might find other ways of parenting—a common example being Hill Collins's (1991) notion of othermothering found in communities outside of the white "norm." Although Pezalla, Pettigrew, and Miller-Day (2012) noted research has been done in this vein, we failed to recognize that the "'how' of a given interview shapes the 'what' that is produced" (167). We failed to ask questions that would allow more possibilities for participants to explain exactly what we actually wanted to know—namely, how they understand themselves as mothers.

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Molly: . . .I think that we are discouraging community, to some degree, through the question [that we asked participants], only because we're asking people to so focus on their individual experiences. But also, that's how you get at the idea of mothers' perceptions.

Grace: Right. Well, and expanding on that some. Yeah, we didn't ask other than like, "Are you a part of mommy groups?" But we didn't go more in-depth. Some of the participants I interviewed were pretty forthcoming with like, "Oh well, I started this particular group," or, "I run this group," or, "I'm really involved; I have a leadership role." But, then others were just like, "Oh, I'm a part of groups on Facebook," and then I would try to probe a little bit and sometimes would not get anything, and then sometimes would get a lot and it just kind of depended at that point how I felt rapport was being built, whether or not I went into that further. . ..

Molly: Yeah, I think that's a really good point that we really. . . We're asking about the communities they're a part of, but then we don't ask anything about the communities they're a part of, right? Like, and even like you're saying, even with probing a little bit, there's only so much you're getting out of that.

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Specifically, we reinscribed discourse even as we sought to help unveil it. As a normative discourse, intensive motherhood (Hays 1996) works at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels to hegemonically reproduce unrealistic standards of good mothering (Newman and Henderson 2014). Trying to frame our project in a way that would give us insight into how mothers have absorbed (and reproduce) the discourse, we ultimately committed the same foul of reproducing the discourse. Kacen and Chaitin (2006) explained that reflexive researchers must also be aware and reflexive of their rhetorical choices. They argued, "When a researcher is reflexive, s/he sees both the object of his/her study and the means by which the object is constituted," meaning reflexivity requires researchers to turn "language back on itself" to identify how discourse constitutes the researchers' world (215). In our excitement to begin interviews, we missed an important opportunity to consider the rhetorical influence of the questions we were asking, from our phrasing to our choice of which questions to use, as well as in what order to ask the questions. We were lucky to have a participant point out this error to us as many researchers, ourselves included, rarely have (or take) the opportunity/space/time to (retro)actively consider the rhetoric of their interview questions.

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Grace: Yeah. Just like, okay, let's get this interview done, make my notes, upload them, move on; it was a lot of survive and check off at that point. And I think that our questions couldn't change because we weren't really communicating throughout that process, and so had we talked I think a little bit more. . . Or had I asked, "What are your participants saying?", and we might have been able to do an IRB [REC] amendment, or even. . . We had it set up as a semi-structured interview guide, we didn't even have a schedule, so we

could have made changes and then gone back and edited a thing. That would have been one specific thing that we could have done better as researchers is working on the collaborative project, not just divided and conquered at that point, like really try to integrate more fully.

Molly: And I think that's something we didn't think about, too, in terms of our difference of interviewing style. So we were trained at different places and to probably look at interviews at least slightly differently.

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Anne's interview was near the end of our data collection period, and we completed data collection based on theoretical saturation before taking the time to reflect on what this call for reflexivity meant for us and our research. As we mentioned earlier, we missed opportunities to discuss our process, but we also missed the opportunity to reflexively consider how *we* were affected by the pandemic and the effects our reactions may have had on our research, specifically during the participant interviews. We were in a state of "divide and conquer" as Grace notes, *because* we were collecting data during a pandemic we were also navigating. But we did not consider this at the time. Instead, we were focused on doing research as we would have normally even though nothing was normal anymore. Our research questions shifted to include considerations of the impact of COVID-19 on participants' mothering, but we did not consider the impacts on ourselves, as researchers or as mothers, in relationship to our project. This is, of course, not to say that our project yielded no valuable data or insights, but it is to acknowledge that deeper levels of reflexivity might have further enriched our findings.

To engage in deeper reflexivity for the project, we conducted two dual interviews virtually. In the first dual interview, we asked one another some of the same questions we had asked of participants. This was a cathartic experience, to recognize our own answers to the questions helped us process feelings about motherhood, about our research, and about interviewing, especially during a pandemic, that we had yet to put to words in any communicative relationship. Our training as interviewers created space only for our participants to talk, so we tried to create a space where we could act as both interviewer and participant. In this way, we formed a more dialogic space, talking and connecting over similar issues we face and educating one another on the differences in our individual motherhood journeys. However, we were ultimately left with the realization that we had still missed the point of deeper researcher reflexivity. Thus, after more conversations to direct and prepare ourselves, we conducted another dual interview aimed specifically at questions of reflexivity in our research. This entire process was designed to encourage further reflexivity, as we describe next.

Bringing Ourselves Back into the Data

While discussing the interviews and what direction we would follow for writing up our research, we reflected on our reactions to what we were hearing, our excitement about the project, and where we would go next. As our projects began to take shape, we kept coming back to Anne's point; we kept thinking about how we inadvertently led our participants through our questions. To bring us back to a place of deeper reflexivity, we had to put ourselves in the place of our participants. We had to make ourselves the site, rather than the topic, of our research (Breault 2016:2).

Duoethnography is not simply a conversation between friend-researchers, however (Ceglowski and Makovsky 2012). Instead, "There must be a focused dialogic exploration between participants" so conversations do not become friendly "chats" (Kinnear and Ruggunan 2019:3). Not to degrade the importance of friendly chats, we understand Kinnear and Ruggunan (2019) to mean duoethnography is focused on a particular topic under study rather than a conversation to catch up with one another. To focus our initial dual interview, we used the interview questions we had asked our participants as a guide. As noted above, our questions were focused on mothers' perceptions of their successes and struggles, and with the reality of COVID-19, our questions shifted to include successes and struggles related to the pandemic as well. We also asked our participants how they thought they might define their parenting style and how that style might compare to others they are around. Recognizing that we, too, were mothers who had experienced the life-shift of the pandemic, our initial dual interview centered around some of these same questions.

We asked one another how we thought we were succeeding and struggling as mothers both before and during the pandemic. Although we conducted interviews with participants in May and early June 2020, we conducted our first dual interview in December 2020, giving us more time to adjust to the reality of a new pandemic normal, as well as analyzing the data, revising for publication, and getting a sense of how we were succeeding through our project as measured by hegemonic productivity markers. All these factors allowed us more insight into how we have succeeded during the pandemic than our participants could have anticipated. Our answers, unsurprisingly, were similar to our participants as we found ourselves struggling with the multiple roles (e.g., mom, instructor, at-home educator) and associated work we needed to balance (Wiant Cummins and Brannon 2021; Collins et al. 2020). We recognized the ways that the isolation of the pandemic had furthered our feelings of loneliness that we were the only ones experiencing motherhood in this particular way, that we alone were struggling. Like one of our participants, Gail, we found ourselves in a strange new world where there never seems to be enough time even though we arguably have more time (e.g., without commutes). But

we have also found success in the ways our children seem to be thriving despite COVID-19 and in our abilities to be involved in their growth in ways we had not previously recognized. This interview made space for us to interact with our data in a new way, by experiencing, to some degree, what we had asked of our participants. However, after transcribing the interview, we knew this did not adequately engage the researcher reflexivity we wanted for this project. We communicated across various platforms—Microsoft Teams calls and chats, text messages, and numerous email chains—to engage ideas, make notes, and create questions we wanted to focus on for a second interview.

In our second dual interview, our guiding questions were about the research and reflexivity. We first focused on how the structure of our questions rhetorically dis/allowed or discouraged participants to think about their mothering in communities of validation and accountability, as Anne had suggested. Then, we asked what we reflexively learned about ourselves as researchers and mothers through this project. Lastly, we focused on how future researchers, including ourselves, can better position themselves reflexively in relationship to participants. In the next section, we offer more about how this second dual interview progressed.

Vulnerability Through Transparency

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Molly: . . .so, of course I think making a call for collaboration is always important because I think there's so much richness—just in the same way that we say diversity makes us stronger. . . I think it also makes us stronger when we think about that we come at this from different angles, different paradigmatic, or research angles, that we have, we're able to bring richer ideas to how to do the research or what that looks like when it's written up or all of those things.

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Throughout this process, we learned how much we realize after-the-fact, how "easy" it is to be reflexive with the benefit of time, distance, and hindsight, a luxury we have had for this essay that many other researchers may not have. One of our major realizations is the opportunities for richness we have had with this project. As researchers from different paradigms, we brought different lenses and ideas on how to design, conduct, analyze, and write up the data and findings. We absolutely advocate for collaboration across disciplines and fields, but even within a field, we advocate for more research across research paradigms. This collaboration highlights which parts of research we individually take for granted; we both assumed we knew what we and the other person were doing in terms of interviewing.

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Molly: . . . all of that is comparison, that's what I think I spent a lot of it [reflection after the project in considering reflexivity] doing was like, "How do I compare to this particular participant?" which I realize is, again, part of the way we've been taught to do interviewing research, but I think that that also makes us more anthropologically gathering data, than it does allow us to have a dialogue or an actual conversation with another human being, not as, "You are my informant and I'm trying to gather as much information as I can from you," but instead to say, "How do we have a conversation with," or, "How do we do an interview *with* a participant instead of kind of like *to* them?"

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One issue this conversation highlighted for us was the process of interviewing itself. How we were both trained to do interviews was to first build rapport through small talk, to try to help a participant feel comfortable to talk with us, but to let the participant do most of the talking. For collecting data, this made the most sense. However, we questioned what it might mean for us, especially as insiders to the phenomenon under study, to consider the interview as a "collaborative enterprise, as an *exchange* between two parties, reflecting on the ways in which the interviewer affects the organization of this talk-in-interaction and the processes by which the talk is produced" (Pezalla, Pettigrew, and Miller-Day 2012:166). We began the project interested in connecting with other mothers to understand their perceptions of motherhood, to understand how others experienced—or did not—what we were experiencing. However, we missed the second part of Pezalla, Pettigrew, and Miller-Day's (2012) suggestion, namely the way we, as interviewers, affected the process of the interview, especially as interviewers with different styles trying to gather similar data across participants.

Similarly, the privilege of hindsight allowed us to consider how our desire to "just get data collection done" kept us from really engaging as co-participants in our interviews. Instead, we engaged in the comparison we were both trying to uncover and critique. There were moments we each had with participants where we connected, where we felt validated and less alone in our individualized mothering situations (O'Reilly 2016). But, there were also moments where it was hard to connect, where data collection or finishing the interview were the driving points such as when I (Grace) interviewed a participant whose parenting style conflicted with my own, specifically the philosophy around spanking. Still, I tried hard to build rapport with the participant. After all, she was simply responding to questions that I had asked. Molly was invested in the idea she says above about interviewing *with* a participant, rather than "adopt[ing] a simple question-and-answer format" in interviewing (Mannay et al. 2018:774). I (Grace) wanted to push back on this idea, however.

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Grace: I know one of the things I really struggled with was I did not want to be the person primarily talking, and that's part of the way I was trained. If you were the interviewer, you need to ask your question and shut up. Let them respond, probe, and move on. . . So I think that was something that I really struggled with was like there were so many opportunities that I felt that I could establish that rapport, that I could establish some of that reflexivity, that I could have even pushed back on some of the participants, but at that point, I was very focused on, but I need you [the participant] to keep talking, one, because I really need this data, and then two, I really don't want it to be about me, because the interview is not supposed to be about me, it's supposed to be about you, but maybe there's things that I could have done better to draw them out and so those are the primary things that I was struggling with.

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I understand Molly's desire to better incorporate participants into the interview and research process, especially given her paradigmatic background. Not having been trained to do that in interviews, but to see interviews as a place to keep the participant talking to gather more data, I was unsure that is the call we should make. Instead, Molly and I discussed the fact that we knew some of the participants outside of the Facebook groups, that some of our rapport-building happened off the record. For me, this specifically happened with Tasha; we ended up talking for close to an hour after I had turned off the recorder. I was frustrated that I had turned off the recorder, but I also recognized a clear cut-off point where she just wanted to talk, where it was no longer about the research. Molly, too, had similar experiences where she connected with participants as friends she knew before the project before or after the recording. This rapport-building is important, especially in light of Molly's desire for more dialogic forms of interviewing, but it also means we are left with hours of this conversation that is not necessarily quotable, let alone that participants may not have wanted it recorded in the first place. Furthermore, we are already asking participants to donate their uncompensated time to an hour-long interview; we cannot ask more of them. We cannot walk into an interview and expect our participants to ask us questions too. Even Molly noted in our dual interview that "an interview is different than building a friendship or building a relationship in that way too." My concern was that we would create an even more privileged or homogenized sample had we asked our participants to do *more* work, especially in an area (e.g., research) in which they may have less experience. We did not ask participants to stop talking, but followed their lead on where the conversation went (using our semi-structured questions) and when the interview part of the conversation began and/or ended.

In response to what Grace writes above, I (Molly) realized another layer of my own reflexivity. I was focused on what researchers could do to equalize participant involvement in research, but I was not thinking about what researchers ask of participants. Grace added another level of complexity, another angle from which to view the research process, deepening my own understanding of our project together and my own projects moving forward. This is what the duoethnography afforded us; it allowed us to take a reflexive look at all that we learned about ourselves, especially as researchers, during a collaborative project to have more insight moving into future projects. If we gain perspective after completing projects, after reading reviews of our work, then reflexivity allows us to apply those lessons as we continually strive to be better, as researchers and as people.

Thinking Forward

We have discussed some of the ways reflexivity has helped us become better researchers as we look at one specific project we conducted together. Now, we want to consider how the lessons learned through reflexivity can help us, as well as potentially help other researchers, as we move forward. We do not claim a universal experience here; rather, we offer insights we see upon which we hope others will expand.

First, we again want to underscore the importance of being reflexive regarding a research sample. Undoubtedly, the importance of diversifying the sample leads to richer insights. At the very least, we hope our lessons learned serve as a reminder that researchers must reflexively consider the cultural conditions allowing particular participants to respond to researchers' calls. Moreover, reflexively considering the cultural circumstances or cultural moment (e.g., a global pandemic) researchers themselves are living through are important insights on researchers' influences on research. Perhaps these insights are dead angles until they are exposed by someone outside the researcher, such as a reviewer. Still, we cannot emphasize enough the importance of continually reevaluating all aspects of researcher positionality and their effects on research outcomes. This includes the project's potential influence on participants. It is not enough for researchers to consider potential impact only during the process of applying for institutional review board (IRB/REC) approval. Rather, researchers must reevaluate their project's influence on participants, on what they are asking of participants, throughout the process. We suggest researchers refine their own processes to include garnering feedback on their work then again evaluating their understandings.

Second, and adding to the first point, we highlight the importance of collaboration. Above, we discuss how collaboration across paradigms might offer more thorough research and research experiences. By allowing room

for multiple kinds of expertise, we learned more about one another, but we also were able to consider multiple points of entry into the investigation and analysis of our data. This has allowed us to have a broader range of research outlets for the lessons learned and research we conducted. We imagine this would be the case for others, as well. Although we certainly know this project could have floundered as a result of our differences, differences we did not thoroughly investigate especially, we also believe researchers who collaborate across paradigms might strengthen and broaden their research skills as well as their results. We are certainly glad we chose to work together and noted that, as Bieler et al. (2021) expressed, collaborating partners are not mandated to share "political or epistemic goals" for successful research and reflexivity as long as they are committed to the process of continually reviewing "professional knowledge practices" (81). One suggestion we make here is about collaboration, even in solo projects. For example, as a solo researcher, what insights might be gained from asking for feedback on a set of interview questions before submitting them to IRB (REC)? This is, of course, not to say that researchers must always gain insight from people who do not research as they do, but it is to suggest that broadening ways of thinking about a topic and/or considering other points of entry may allow for a richer overall research project.

Third, one of the struggles we identified after conducting research is our lack of communication about our research. Of course, especially as communication instructors, we call for more effective communication between and among research partners throughout the research process. However, we learned from our project that the effective communication must be about our process as researchers as well as the data we are collecting. In other words, it is not enough to talk about the fact that we are going to do a particular project or that we are completing it as agreed. It is equally important to discuss how we are going to conduct that project and about the process of completing it. We have to ask ourselves and each other: What are we finding? How are we asking questions? What seemed so obvious when we began the project—that we would collect data via interviews—ended up being an underexplored potentiality for a richer project. Had we discussed our interviewing experience, philosophies, and approaches up front, we might have been able to engage in interviews that resulted in even richer data. Thus, as other researchers engage collaboratively, we encourage them to discuss their reasoning and process with one another, to not take for granted that approaches will mesh. We count ourselves lucky that our approaches meshed well enough that we did not have to learn this lesson the hard way.

As we think about extending this lesson, we suggest Ph.D. programs that teach specifically qualitative research methods consider the last time their

schedule of classes was updated. What might be gained by offering a class on perspectives of interviewing principles at a graduate level? How might programs help mold students into more well-rounded researchers capable of considering multiple perspectives with more depth, potentially increasing their abilities to more deeply engage reflexivity? While we recognize not every program can afford (financially or otherwise) to change programs or classes, we do hope graduate students will be encouraged to explore multiple perspectives through reading and collaboration in their research.

Finally, and perhaps most important, is the reminder that reflexivity is a continual process of growth. Researchers do not reach some kind of threshold where reflexivity is fully achieved forevermore; rather, the process is one of establishing positionalities and learning to see what was previously hidden. With every review or conversation about our work, we found previously un(der)considered angles into our research. Now that we have been made aware of these missing perspectives, our research is better informed and better positioned as we move forward. For example, we gained a deeper level of respect for the process of anonymous reviews through our research; each review inspired us to interact with our data and/or the analysis in deeper ways. Even though reflexivity is an ongoing process, where the privileges of our positionalities hinder us from always seeing all the important angles of our research, we call for researchers to engage more deeply into reflexivity in their own projects. This is, of course, not to say researchers are not already deeply engaging how their positionalities influence their work. Our call is, instead, to compel researchers to continue the work, to (re-)commit to doing the imperative work of reflexivity.

Conclusion

Research is supposed to change the scope of knowledge, to change the world, however slightly. Research is more effective when researchers engage in reflexivity and acknowledge the ways they have influenced their research projects. Reflexivity is important throughout the entire research process, including when the data collection is done, and the results are written. Then, reflexivity is not only about the researcher's influence over the research, it is also about the project's influence over the researcher and the participant. What has the researcher learned about research that drives them forward? How do they design a better project the next time? The continual process of reflexivity pushes researchers to keep growing, to keep expanding our understandings of spheres of influence.

In this essay, we used duoethnography to explore researcher reflexivity about our collaborative research project interviewing mothers about their

perceived successes and struggles as mothers, especially during the early part of the COVID-19 global pandemic. We tried to be transparent by choosing to include excerpts of the transcript of our dual interview (Breault 2016). Our hope is that sharing our experience of reflexivity in relationship to a research project will "precipitate other stories" from readers to explore their own relationships with reflexivity in their research (Breault 2016, 3). Ideally, this will create ripples where researchers reflexively question not only their research approaches and outcomes, but also how we teach research to students, creating more reflexive researchers in the future. Research is strengthened when it is transparent and when researchers account for the ways they influence their projects. Continuing to normalize reflexivity in research ultimately makes the findings we produce, consume, and draw upon stronger.

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