

CIVIC: Qualitative Core x Research Work Group
Doing Better Research Series

Reflexivity Workshop

2024

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BERD OHSU Portland OR

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Dylan Waller
Kyla Tompkins
RELATE Lab team
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Reminder #1: this process is a cycle

Intersectionality helps you "think with" complex social realities

Your responses change reality



Positionality makes explicit your shifting position in that world

Reflexivity is your (research) response to that position

Reminder #2: reflexivity is not an all-or-nothing practice

What you are able to implement as reflexivity practices will be influenced by your context and collaborators. A goal for today is to have you leave with ideas for some ways that you can bring reflexivity into your research, both now and in the longer term.

Reminder #3: these concepts apply in qualitative *and* quantitative research

"In an ideal world, the quantitative community would entirely dismiss the notion that data about human beings collected, analysed, and interpreted by other human beings can ever be fully objective. This is a point of epistemological and ontological contention, but we believe it is time to confront this issue."

Jamieson, Govaart, & Pownall (2023)

Ontology and
Epistemology
AGAIN??



What is reflexivity?

“Reflexivity is based on an iterative process where the researcher takes on a critical account of their “self-location” (with regard to their gender, class, ethnicity, etc.), interests, assumptions, and life experiences and considers how these factors shape their relationship with study participants, the research process and, ultimately, the knowledge that is produced.”

(Rankl, Johnson, & Vindrola-Padros (2021) drawing on Pillow (2003) and

Another way of defining it:

"Reflexivity is 'an attitude of attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction, especially to the effect of the researcher, at every step of the research process.'... The verb or action for doing reflexivity is "attending" and how one attends is 'systematically' and from a 'critical stance.'"

Crabtree & Miller, citing the <http://qualres.org> website, in *Doing Qualitative Research* (3rd Edition) - our emphasis

"If positionality refers to what we know and believe, then reflexivity is about what we do with this knowledge."

Jamieson, Govaart,
& Pownall (2023)

Why reflexivity?

- It enhances rigor and validity, by identifying and considering assumptions shaping the research
- It provides an epistemological alternative to positivism - one that you can describe in your work and that will be recognized by others
- It can strengthen your research's ability to engage with structural power dynamics in the research process and in society, where your research will be applied
- It's stimulating
- It might align with your ethical values as well as your epistemology

"Reflexivity is not a limitation; it is an asset in your research."

"The concept of reflexivity is rooted in feminist and postcolonialist traditions that sought to highlight the unequal and hierarchical nature of researcher-participant relationships and the oppressive nature of the research process itself."

*Rankl, Johnson, and
Vindrola-Padros 2021*

**One lineage of
reflexive
scholarship:
qualitative and
feminist social
sciences**

And:

Reflexivity and related concepts are central in Indigenous research approaches and ethics. This is often overlooked and marginalized.

As with intersectionality, dominant white culture did not get here first or exclusively.

Being reflexive does not = Indigenous or decolonizing research methods.

The common ground of different knowledge paradigms is fertile and (once again) "good to think with."

Reflexivity helps us notice assumptions about "the problem"

"Many researchers, even those with the best of intentions, frame their research in ways that assume that the locus of a particular research problem lies with the indigenous individual or community rather than with other social or structural issues. For example, researchers investigating poor health...often focus on the community as the sole source of the problem and, because this is their focus, obviously fail to analyse or make sense of the wider social, economic and policy contexts in which communities exist. Often their research simply affirms their own beliefs....It becomes somewhat difficult for indigenous researchers to discuss 'research,' 'problem' and 'indigenous' without individuals or communities switching off because of the history of defining indigenous peoples as...the problem." *Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies (2nd Ed.), 2012*

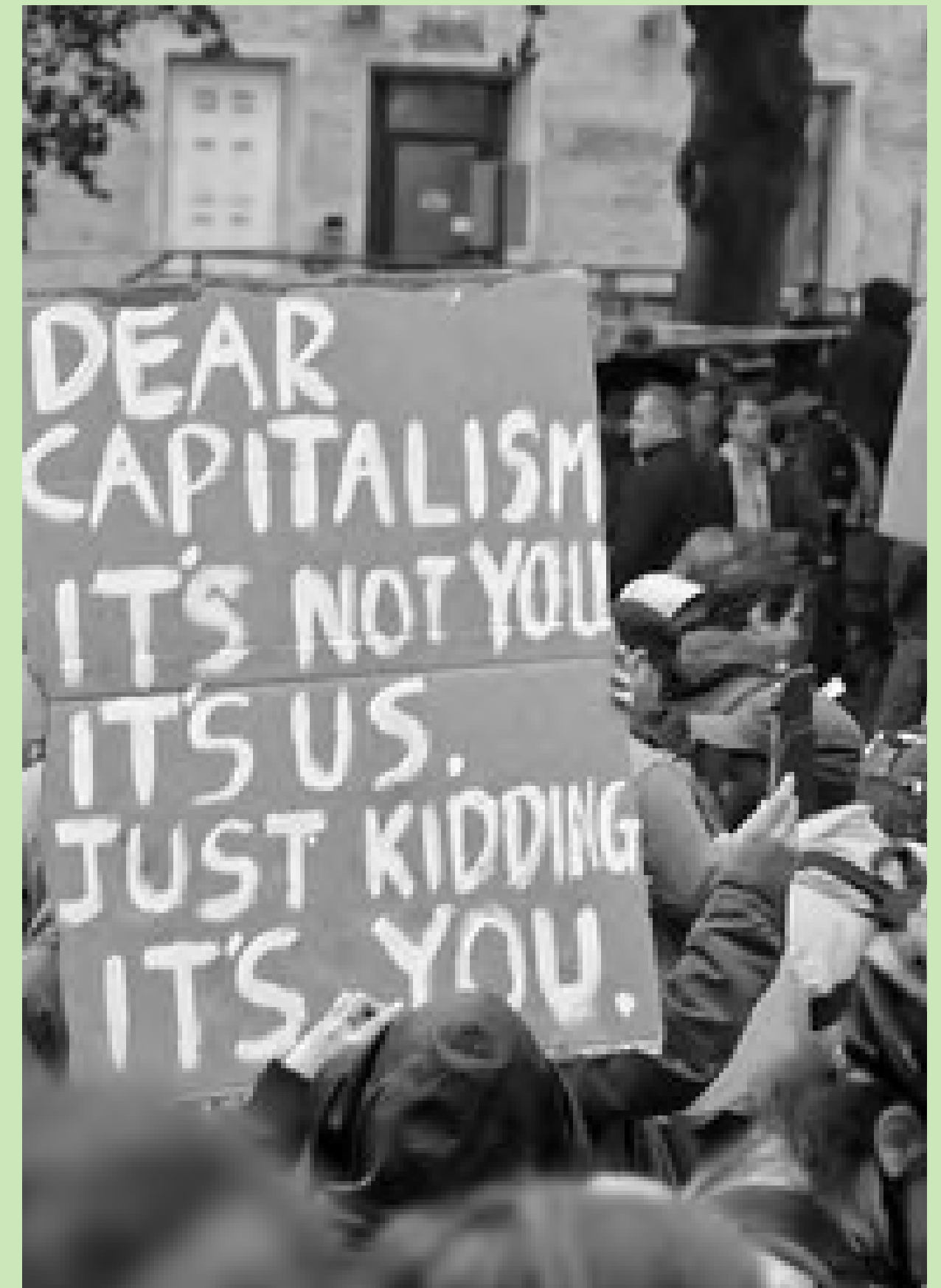
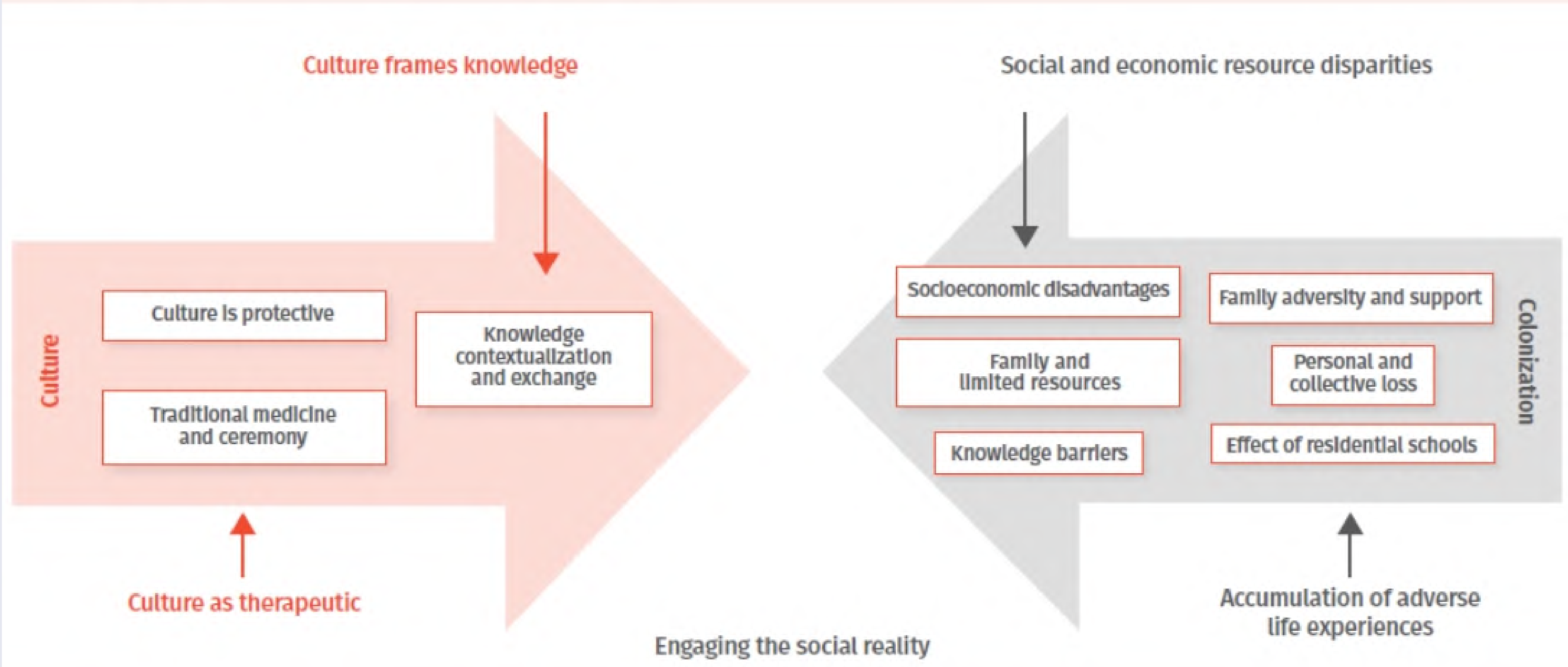


Image: We are Molecules Facebook page, 2012

Reflexivity at work in the "problem" of diabetes (Crowshoe and colleagues, 2019)

Figure 5. Conceptual model of engaging the social reality



To improve diabetes care, Crowshoe and team recommend clinicians "critically reflect on your own concepts of health and diabetes care and potential assumptions about Indigenous perspectives."

This holds for researchers, too.

What do you think are the cause of diabetes?

What data would you collect on causes, predisposing factors, etc.?

What are the solutions?

What interventions would you even try?

What outcomes are important?

How would you make sure that your research doesn't *only* "affirm [your] own beliefs"?

Exercise 1:
"Cultural Review"
5 minutes self-work
10 minutes small groups
Reflections

Imagine you are at the beginning of a current or past research project you work(ed) on. Spend the next 5 minutes writing down everything you can think of from your life experiences that might influence how you think about the problem to address, the data to collect, the people to involve, and other aspects of the project.

We are not going to ask you to share what you write. We will ask you to share how the exercise felt, and any insights you want to share that came from doing it.

Some prompts to get you going:

- Before you came to the project, what did you know about the topic? How did you know about it - from your family or friends' experiences, from popular culture and the media, from formal schooling, etc.?
- Is the research focused on a health condition you have direct personal or family experience with? What do you know about how that health condition has been part of your life or the lives of people around you?
- Is the research focused on a population you identify with?
 - If so - how relevant does the research question feel? Why do you think it is important or not?
 - If not - What have been your interactions with this population? Do you think this is an important research question for them? Why do you think that?

Four Areas for Team Reflexivity

1. Design assumptions

-Question the assumptions that researchers bring to the table.
Research design is not objective and carries our assumptions.

2. Data collection and analysis processes

-Communication → Regular Communication
-Consistency → Standardized Tools

3. Multidisciplinary collaboration

-Discipline
-Level of Experience
• Race, gender, SES, education, disability...

4. Responsible dissemination

-Academic journals are one of many options for dissemination of your research

Rankl, F., Johnson, G. A., & Vindrola-Padros, C. (2021). Examining what we know in relation to how we know it: A team-based reflexivity model for rapid qualitative health research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 31(7), 1358-1370.

When, where, and how to bring in reflexivity?

Study Design


- What are my research motives?
- What are my design assumptions? (Initial & Ongoing)
- Who is (and is not) on my team?

Data Collection & Analysis

- How does who I am contribute to the questions I am (or am not) asking?
- How does my bias contribute to the way I see the data?

Dissemination

- What is the message?
- To whom am I presenting my findings?

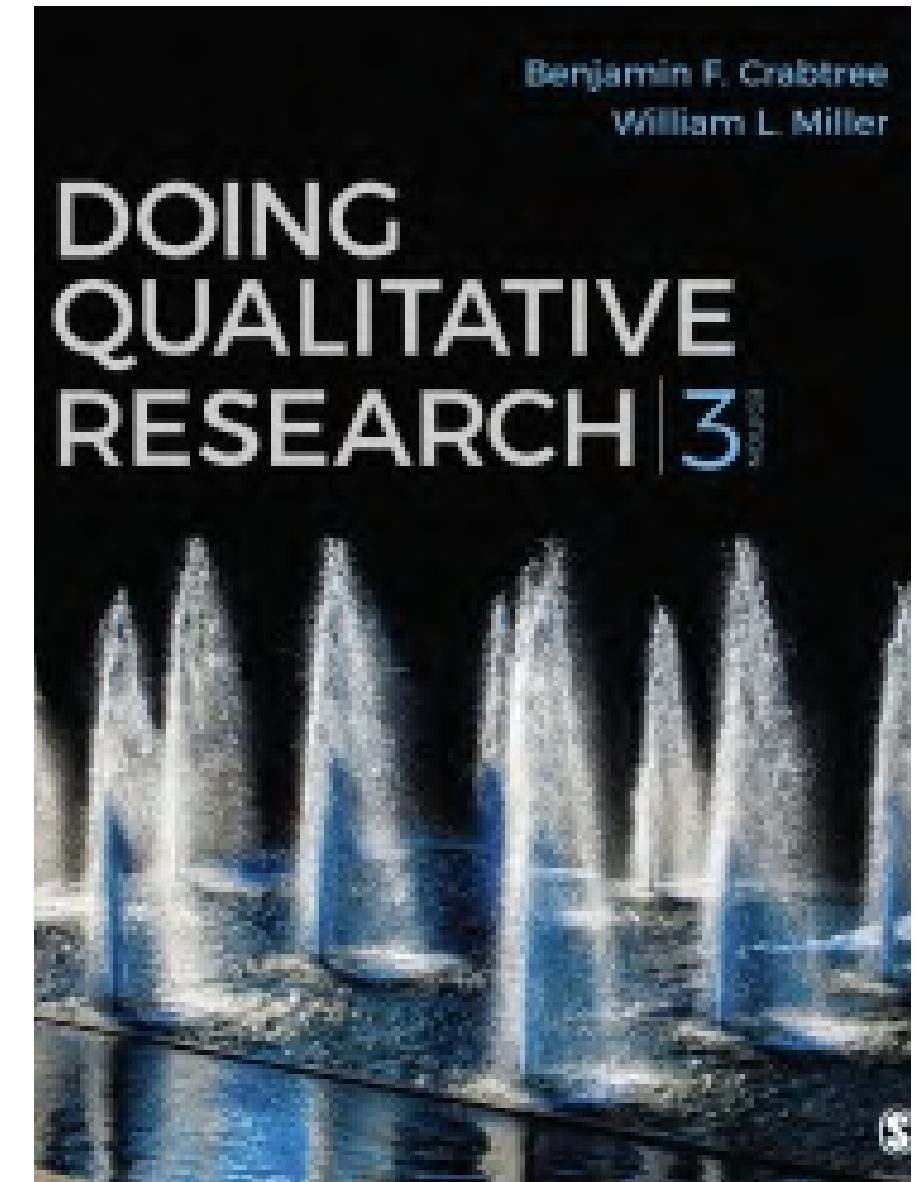


Maintain awareness of the effect your positionality has on research decisions throughout all stages of research.

Every team needs a menu of reflexivity tools

Here are some from Crabtree and Miller 2023 (also in your handout)

- Cultural Review (you just did this)
- Log/audit trails - to document changes in thinking-
- Journaling (with or without sharing)
- Reflexive vignettes - stories that highlight tensions, shared on the team
- Circuit breakers - physical/thought interrupters
- Periodic Review of Reflexivity Questions-
- Dialogic Engagement with Partners
- Investigator (Team Member) Interviews
- Memos - brief "ideas, musings, impressions that arise during the research process" (example coming up!)



Reflexive Practice:
Memoing in Data Analysis
in the
Tending to Partnerships Study

Example + discussion time



Anaïs Tuepker, PhD, MPH

Anaïs is a social scientist whose research focuses on improving primary health care for both health workers and patients. She believes relationships are at the heart of how we craft our lives and make change in the world, and for that reason her work often focuses on topics like relational leadership and building effective partnerships between health systems and community-based organizations. For the last 10 years, she has been an Investigator within the VA Portland Health Care System. She is also a community activist and organizer around climate, environmental justice, and sustainability issues. She has a PhD in Sociology and a Master's Degree in Public Health. She grew up in the Gulf South and the rural Midwest, and has been putting down roots in Portland for the last two decades. She is a devoted but definitely

amateur gardener. She has an ongoing commitment to learning about Indigenous cultural and research practices, and the ways all researchers can benefit from a wider understanding of what kinds of knowledge can contribute to improved well-being.



Dylan Waller, MS

Dylan is a sociologist who has been doing research in the medical field for over ten years, seven of which have been with the VA. As a research associate, Dylan often works on multiple projects concurrently, through contributing his skills in project development, interviewing and data analysis. His favorite work most often centers community building among minoritized identities (such as race, mental health, economic status, gender, sexual orientation, rural living). Dylan

does his best to honor the individuals he interviews through telling their stories in the hope of influencing positive change in the world.

A resident of Portland, OR since 2010, Dylan delights in his status of amateur vegetable gardener - his **Try Pitch** is he plants too many tomato plants each year, but that just means there are plenty to share with friends and neighbors! When not at home, he loves to take road trips, and has a long-term goal of

Meet the Tending to Partnerships project

https://www.portlandcoin.research.va.gov/Research/Tending_to_Partnerships.asp

"Meet our Team" page shares publicly, and in easy access webpage, where we come from, our own experience with the research focus, what we love, what we look like.....to help people decide whether and how to take part

Reflexive Memoing practice

After every research interview:

- **2 people review the transcript/ recording) independently**
- **Each researcher creates a memo summarizing impressions and key points**
- **Memo includes a "reflexive" prompt, where we note responses to the data/participant and try to identify where they're coming from;**
- **We meet to discuss our memos, see what we interpreted differently, or things to pay attention to that one of us might have missed. It also helps us notice and confirm subtle things we see in common.**
- **After these steps, we integrate data into themes/findings.**

Next 2 slides show examples of our reflexive memos, from 2 different interviews

I'm really rooting for her! Noting our shared background of white families; being a person of color in a white family is an interesting experience. Definitely related to her experience of wanting to respect older people but not being able to accept their "wrong" views – this comes up so much in my life, too! Noticed how she brought up [name] and the Black woman attendee and how they validated her against microaggressions – the idea that she has a place where she feels kind of safe and validated feels really nice. -Dylan

I felt a lot of common ground with her, especially around the ways she is so grateful for/glad to engage with Native healing, her desire and her caution there as a non-Native person. Also just her general way of reflecting on things. Her respect for her elders. Her love/affection for her husband but also recognition of the things he doesn't get because of his positionality. -Anais

I liked her, she seems really pleasant. Liked her response to the suggestion to volunteer – she was really real in her response that she'd done that as a caretaker. A talking session like what is described at [project] is my worst nightmare, just FYI to keep in mind. Also doesn't really fit with preconception of what ecotherapy is. Her "it's great we don't talk about politics here" is a bit of a red flag because that often means that things that affect my life (race, among other things) to you are not important or uncomfortable for them. -Dylan

Really appreciated how open she was about her personal mental health and grief the last couple years, and I found that moving. I struggled with how to interpret her discussion of "politics" because to me it sounds like a fairly common response of whiteness (but not just that – don't oversimplify, don't ignore). -Anais

Other ways we are working on "attending" to reflexivity

- Since neither of us is a Veteran, how do we benefit from Veteran insights?
 - 2024 we added Veteran researcher to the team, brought Veteran community partners in to co-design next stage of research
- Where should we share this work, to benefit Veterans?
 - Brought community partners to academic conference to share the "stage," they posted on their social media
- Where to publish, community settings to share results in?
- Recruitment: we set and met goals for 50% participation by women and 20% minoritized racial identities.
 - Outreach has become more transparent about our desire to identify and study interventions that are designed for women Veterans and/or Veterans

Once your team accepts reflexivity is "worth it," there are still common challenges:

- 1) Creating shared understanding among team members
- 2) Creating a collaborative environment
- 3) Communicating across all stages of the research process

Practicing reflexivity is not always easy or safe to do, depending on the environment. Reflexivity should be consensual. Some practices can be implemented alone, but some require your collaborators (researchers, funders, institutions, etc.). Practice what feels acceptable and "safe enough" within the bounds of trust.



Coda: What about axiology?

"If we had to it all over again, we would make values, or more correctly, **axiology** (the branch of philosophy dealing with ethics, aesthetics, and religion) a part of the basic foundational philosophical dimensions of paradigm proposal." *

What makes knowledge *good*?

Who does your research serve?

How does it serve you?

*Guba and Lincoln (2005) quoted by Margaret Kovach (2021), discussing the important role of axiology in Indigenous research methods

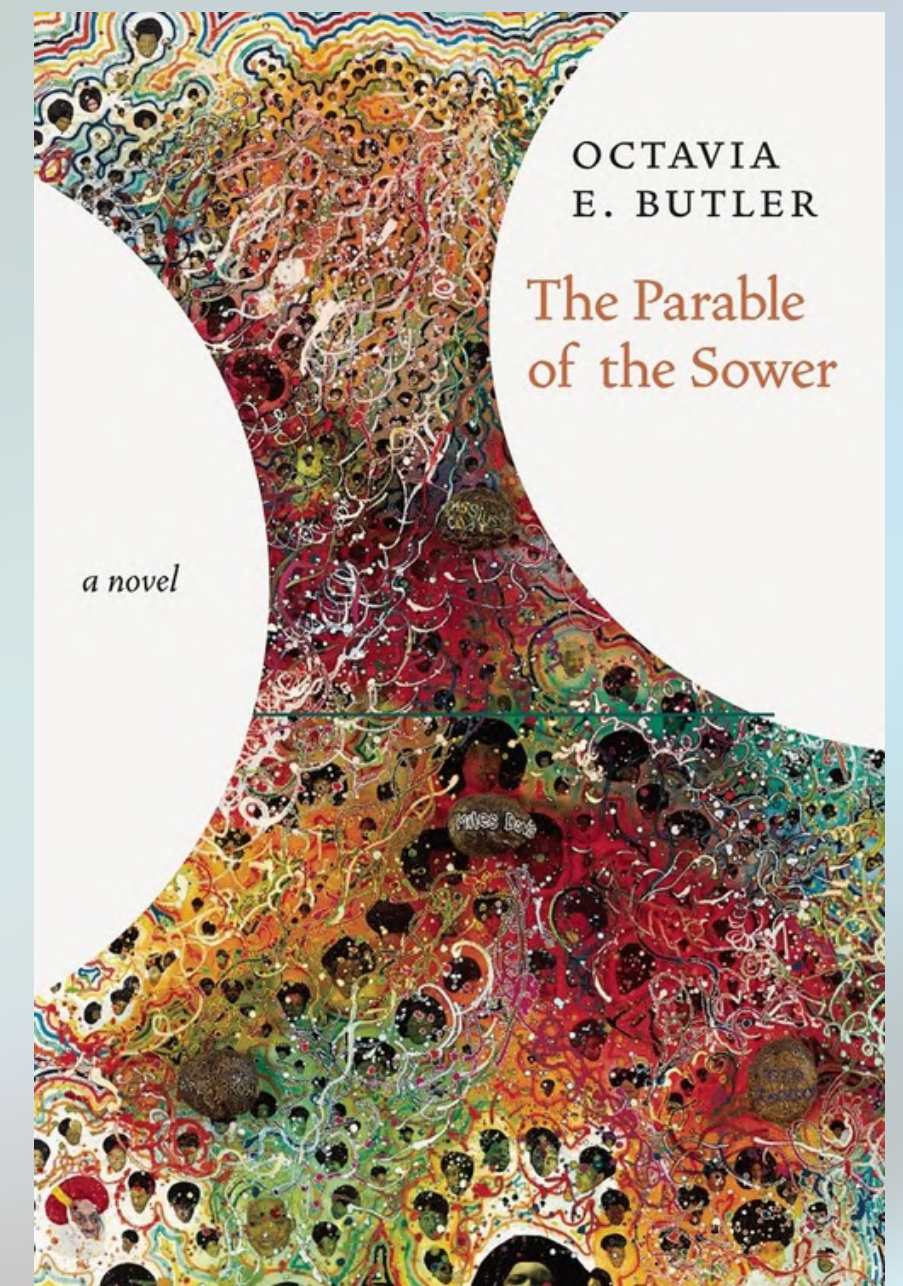
If research doesn't change you, then you haven't done it right.

Shawn Wilson (in *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, 2008)

All that you touch you change.

All that you change changes you.

Octavia Butler (in *The Parable of the Sower*, 1993)



And....Thank you!

Further definitions and resources on reflexivity (also in your handout):

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0142159X.2022.2057287>

Image credits:

Strawberries: Anais Tuepker

Pottery wheel: Lindsey Elsey, Unsplash

Ontology suspicious dog: Illumination Marketing, Unsplash

"Dear Capitalism": We Are Molecules Facebook Page, 2011

Parable of the Sower cover: Seven Stories press edition, posted on

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