Caring as an Emergent Method in Qualitative Research: A Means for Moving between Research Studies and Practical Support

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Overview

• This is a story about caring.
  – Where I fit in
  – Where others fit

• Defining caring

• Phase 1:
  – Dissertation study
  – Emerging practical supports

• Phase 2:
  – Follow up study
  – Adjusted practical supports

• Resultant steps for moving from caring to practical supports
What is caring?

• Defining caring
  – Wanting to help others
  – Doing kindness
  – Showing concern for others

• Caring for our participants

• Caring for ourselves? Can we care about ourselves within our research studies?
Phase 1: Dissertation Study (2014)

• Study of doctoral students who became mothers for the first time
  – Trying to understand experiences of doctoral student motherhood and mothering
  – I wanted to help others, and myself
• Participants asked questions and sought advice
  – Answers and practical support were desired

Drawing created by DocMama1 to demonstrate how she felt as a doctoral student mother: wonderful and “precarious”
One solution: Development of Practical Support Systems for Doctoral Student Mothers

• “Dissertating Mama’s”
  – Facebook group
  – Social support system for mothers working on their dissertation

• The group became a resource & support for others and also for me

• Evolved over time as the student mothers transitioned
  – 2014-2015: Dissertation focus
  – 2015-ongoing: Academic career
First phase of caring leading to practical supports

- Recognition of varied supports for doctoral student mothers
- Development of the dissertation project
- Gaps noticed in the supports desired by the participants
- Development of online support group
Phase 2: What happens after graduation for doctoral student mothers?

- From caring about myself (quietly) to openly being included
- 2016: follow up study with the original DocMama’s, and included my own participation
- How do doctoral student mothers experience the transition to their future careers?
Findings suggested a need for practical supports for academic mothers

Integration of work and family

“This is my reality today. I am sitting on the floor, addressing dissertation revisions, while my eight year old occupies my bed/office.”
(Motherscholar 2)

Compartmentalization

“but right now all I feel is a flood of joy and happiness to have my little sidekick back with me. No thoughts of work in my mind for the next few days...”
(Motherscholar 3)
Caring for the collective experience

Multiple experiences

Suggested need for practical supports
Adjusted practical support: The need to show that mothers in academia are a presence

• From a closed Facebook group
• New practical support, a public website
• The Motherscholar Project
• www.motherscholar.com
Reflecting on caring: Including ourselves in the research process

• Typical formats:
  – Participant observation, autoethnography, positionality statements, PAR, etc.
  – [bracketing] our experiences

• A different means as well, as a means towards practical support
In summary

• Practical supports were a result of caring for others and myself;

• Caring before, during, after the research process
Future questions

• How can qualitative researchers effectively showcase caring as a technique within their studies?
• Where does caring start and end within a study?
• As with other emergent methods in qualitative research (e.g., arts-based research), what ways can we use to show the rigor of caring in our studies?
Thank you!

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Additional resources/references

- [Dissertating Mama’s community support Facebook group](#)
- [The Motherscholar Project](#), making mothers’ presence in academia visible.