CHAPTER 6.

CO-INTERPRETATION IN ACTION

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Collie Fulford with Adrienne Long
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In the previous chapter, we rationalized our approach to engaging with participants from our position as feminist qualitative researchers who work across institutional, racial, age-related, and other boundaries with the goal of making writing research more just. We turn now to our individual research projects to demonstrate a methodology of interpreting and writing with participants who have become research partners. Throughout this chapter, we ask readers to pay attention to the process we create along with, and in response to, Adrienne and Gwen as we are guided by them as co-interpreters. We learn with them how to become more ethical researchers and how to shape our practices from these three principles:

1. Researchers and participants are both experts.
2. Researchers and participants can dwell together in interpretation and writing.
3. Research design is best when it is flexible.

The three principles guide us during the co-interpretative process that we discuss throughout this chapter. Because our studies have become longitudinal, and because they sprawl in unexpected directions, we emphasize the importance of tending to research relationships. We sustain our work by checking in, sharing drafts and listening to feedback, showing curiosity about our participants' lives beyond the limits of the traditional researcher-researched interaction, swapping stories and photos, even strategizing about ways to be a caregiver. These very personal, ordinary exchanges can only occur when there is genuine respect and trust. The respect and trust soften boundaries and permit us to take risks together; they hold us in a space of ongoing productivity. The co-interpretive activities described in this chapter depend on already established relationships. However, this does not mean that researchers need to know participants for ten years before they can work together. Our point is that we always try to be real and open and considerate of participants' needs as well as our own.

When participants put so much trust in us, it changes what and how we produce. We strongly believe that sustaining research relationships is even more valuable than obtaining a work product. The product may come and is likely to be different from what we imagined at the planning stage. We have to be open to research design and the product shifting in response to the people who are involved. We are always asking how this research serves the people and communities that it is about.

In this chapter, we illustrate each of the three principles in action as we look closely at relationships with two longtime research participants whom we introduce in the following section. In addition to considering their involvement in multiple living and learning contexts, we acknowledge that Adrienne and Gwen have come to our research through unconventional educational pathways, something that defines them as people and research analysts. We describe the processes we engage with them, then conclude by speculating about the future of our collaborative work because, even as we write this, our longitudinal research continues. This is co-interpretation in action with these participants in this moment.

Adrienne and Gwen's involvement in research shows that co-interpretation is more than a member check on a researcher's analysis. It asserts participants' expertise about their own lives and texts. They have opportunities for narrating experiences, selecting examples and stories, rationalizing those selections, defining their actions, and theorizing their situations. Some of those responsibilities are conventionally associated with the researcher role but less often ascribed to participants. It takes conscious effort for researchers to release some of the control and to share responsibility for thinking about the research itself alongside participants. Yet the quality of work that co-interpretation enables justifies such a joint approach.

The principles we articulated in the previous chapter are elaborated with examples from our ongoing studies. Although we organize this chapter by principle, we also note the fluidity and simultaneity of the concepts we are constructing. We encourage readers to layer and combine research practices; similarly, we hope that researchers will view these principles as adaptable and co-informing. Even though we do not name it distinctly as a principle, we believe that co-interpretive research should always serve participants, partners, and their communities. We rely on our research and writing partners to remind us of those interests and needs and to steer our work in mutually beneficial directions.

ONE: RECOGNIZING PARTICIPANTS AS EXPERTS

As ethical researchers, it is important for us to put aside the sense that we come to research relationships as the specialists. To truly respect participants, we need

to yield our view of academic knowing to their perspectives. The first principle takes into account all our ways of knowing. That's how we co-create new knowledge that we can bring back to our respective communities.

Lauren: From Shirley to Gwen

Lauren began conducting literacy case studies with a group of adult learners in 2005. One of the original participants in those studies, Chief, has been involved in Lauren's research until the present. His participation has included formal and informal interviews, sharing writing samples, and fortunately, the willingness to stay in touch. Lauren has published a monograph and articles about her work with Chief (2015; 2018; 2020; Rosenberg & Kerschbaum, 2021). This work (2018; 2023), including a chapter for a previous collection in Lifespan Studies (2020), demonstrates how, across time, Lauren's research on the writing practices of adults who have become more literate later in life has become longitudinal. She reflects on the development of her relationships with participants, which initially were for the purpose of academic research but later morphed into the warm social interactions one might enjoy with close friends or family.

A few months after her book was published, Lauren met Chief's wife Shirley for the first time. She writes in "'Still Learning,'"

> During that visit to Chief's house, I was introduced to the vibrant Shirley, whom I had only heard described before by Chief. Relaxing on the sofa after an early morning stint volunteering at the local food pantry, Shirley was effusive about her lifelong love of reading. Her passion for literate activity includes the personal and the practical. For example, as a home care nurse's aide for most of her career, Shirley engaged in the daily practices she needed to provide care for her clients, which included managing their household and bank accounts, paying bills, driving the car, and even having power of attorney. . . .
>
> While I listened to her describe her literacy habits that day in their living room, I wondered whether it was Shirley's practical intelligence combined with her enthusiasm for writing and reading that made literacy education so desirable to Chief. I recalled a discussion I had had with him during our earlier interviews, in which we discussed a pattern I'd heard talk of at the literacy center where we had met: that it is common in traditional marriages for women to be more literate than

their male partners and that a change in one partner's writing
development can cause a significant disruption. When I re-
minded Chief of this conversation, Shirley exclaimed that this
was not the case for them. Conditions in their lives improved
as Chief acquired more literacy. Afterwards, I could not
stop thinking about Chief and Shirley together, the way she
reclined on the sofa telling her story while I spoke with Chief
about the book. (pp. 20-21)

Since then, Shirley has become a participant in Lauren's research. The pas-
sage above draws from an article on the entwined trajectory of Chief and Shir-
ley's literate lives (Rosenberg, 2018) that explores Shirley's uses of writing in con-
texts such as work, community, and church. Lauren also considers how Shirley's
engagement with writing and reading influences her husband's choices about
his literate activities. Shirley and Lauren stay in touch regularly. Sometimes it is
over a draft of an article that Lauren wants Shirley to member-check or simply
have in its final form (Shirley always reads promptly and sends a comment), or it
might be a holiday card or letter. The personal correspondence always expresses
love from Shirley and Chief and a reminder that Lauren has become someone
close to them. Their ongoing conversations around Shirley's writing led Lauren
to broach the subject of writing together. Shirley said yes immediately, which
brings us to the present moment when they are figuring out what it means to
be co-authors.

There's something else important to address before turning to the content
of co-authoring with Shirley. The shift from participant to author acknowledg-
es Shirley's authority. As a participant, Shirley was protected by a pseudonym.
The research she engaged in with Lauren underwent human subjects review and
was IRB approved at three institutions where Lauren worked and conducted
research. Even in the role of participant, confidentiality slipped when Shirley got
a Facebook account and began commenting on Lauren's posts. While Facebook
Messenger is one of the primary platforms they use to communicate personally,
Shirley's public postings on Lauren's wall demonstrate slippage of IRB protec-
tion. In this case, it is the participant's choice to break confidentiality when she
writes on social media, sometimes referencing visits they have had or mention-
ing her husband by name.

We believe that it would be unethical to refer to Shirley as an author by
pseudonym unless that was her choice. It is also important for her to represent
herself as an author who is an expert on her experiences. Therefore, in this chap-
ter, we refer to Gwen by her actual name as a way to indicate the shift to author.
We compose without disguise because our collaborators are not vulnerable and

do not call for protection of their identity. Their visibility is important; they should receive credit within this work and future work that stems from it with acknowledgement of their recognizable, identifiable names, as is reflected in the credits for this chapter.

COLLIE: ADRIENNE AS PARTICIPANT, ACTIVIST, RESEARCHER, AND ADULT STUDENT

"You have to meet Adrienne," a staff member at transfer services told Collie. He recommended Collie meet a forthright new transfer student whom he thought would be interested in her research. Fall 2019 was Adrienne Long's first semester back in college since 1997. She had intermittently attended three different colleges in the 1990s before she "put things on hold" to raise her two children. Once they were in college, it was Adrienne's turn. In the intervening 22 years, Adrienne's professional life had included work as a learning consultant within a large company's career center and corporate sales and marketing for a trucking company. When Collie met her, Adrienne was holding two jobs, nanny and retail associate, and taking four classes toward a degree in psychology. Despite the considerable know-how from her years of employment and family life, and her firm desire to complete her degree, Adrienne's reentry to the university was difficult. She felt disorientation as she tried to restart her academic life in a system that did not recognize her experiential knowledge gained from learning outside of the academy.

Of the thirty participants who eventually joined Collie's study, Adrienne's involvement was unique. Collie and Adrienne developed a lasting and flexible relationship that contributed to the research. They shared an investment in adult students within higher education, and that investment manifested in different projects they each initiated and involved the other in.

For Adrienne and Collie, 2019-2021 were years marked by intensive change. Adrienne completed her studies by attending school full time, year-round, while founding the Adult Learners Student Organization ("ALSO, because we are *also* students") to lift up other students like herself. Meanwhile, she continued as an essential worker through the COVID-19 pandemic. That Adrienne was never Collie's student probably contributes to the ease with which they slid between positions that blur research roles, institutional hierarchies, and their personal lives. Before Adrienne joined the study of adult students' writing lives as a participant, she and Collie already regarded each other as co-conspirators in the mission of educational equity for adult students. Adrienne invited Collie to attend planning meetings of her nascent student organization and Collie invited Adrienne to join her studies first as a participant and later as a researcher. The

boundaries between Collie's research and Adrienne's activism became extremely porous. They wove in and out of each other's projects, amplifying and endorsing each other's work as equals. Collie came to regard ALSO almost as an advisory board for the research, while Adrienne treated Collie as a de facto faculty advisor to the student organization.

The most significant deepening of Adrienne's and Collie's partnership occurred during the summer of 2021 when Adrienne joined a research team that Collie co-led as part of Duke University's Story+ project. The "HBCU Counterstories" project included analysis of transcripts from a previous study about adult students' reasons for leaving and returning to college. The team also compiled media about adult students, HBCUs, and the intersections of these research topics. Long after the summer ended, Adrienne continued independently investigating using both new skills and prior expertise. She seamlessly folded research about adult students into her advocacy work. She created a Facebook group where she curated more media about adult HBCU students. She made a video about their research to share with one of Collie's classes. In these ways, Adrienne evolved from participant to co-researcher on Collie's studies. Adrienne has since independently initiated related projects, including forming a documentary team to produce media about the experiences of adult students.

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT RACE IN RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

We cannot write this chapter without acknowledging the presence of race and the ways that our whiteness has shaped and informed our projects with Gwen and Adrienne. As two white women researchers involved in long term collaborations with Black women participants, we are in precarious positions because of the history of white racial domination and our own complicity within that apparatus; we try not to avoid responsibility. Our subject positions intersect with other identities, most obviously, our roles as mid-career academic researchers. Adrienne and Gwen, whom we respect and learn from on many levels, do not come from positions of academic authority. Working across racial differences is work we take on together by acknowledging our differences and using them as opportunities to self-reflect and act mindfully. We all want to be involved in this research and to learn and grow from it. Since our desire to collaborate on research and writing is mutual, we continue to make the effort to sustain these important relationships. Though we work toward maintaining open and honest communication with Adrienne and Gwen, it is also important for us to critically interrogate our own positions and actions throughout this work. We resist succumbing to white fragility and instead try to be truthful with ourselves as responsible researchers and writers.

In the introduction to *Race, Rhetoric, and Research Methods,* co-authors Alexandria Lockett, Iris Ruiz, James Chase Sanchez, and Christopher Carter (2021) ask, "[For example,] what motivates a White researcher to study 'people of color' without disclosing what's at stake for them to be writing about difference, race, equity, diversity, etc.? What kinds of risks are White researchers willing to take in their work that match the intensity of the life/death urgency of eradicating racial, gender, and economic inequality?" (p. 24). We take their questions seriously. Both of us have devoted our academic careers to working against appropriating the experiences of other people by taking steps in our analysis of data, writing, and revision to challenge our assumptions about representation. (See Fulford, 2022; Rosenberg, 2015; Wymer & Fulford, 2019; Wymer, Fulford, Baskerville & Washington, 2012.) We present our research participants' stories so that they speak for themselves rather than be spoken for by us. As researcher-writers, we mediate the telling. However, we do so by continually checking ourselves in the process (and asking for participants to check as well when they read drafts of our writing) to catch our assumptions and biases, and to be sure that we are honest when we claim the goal of writing without appropriation of experience. Because of the relative power of our positions as white mid-career academics, we are aware of the damage we might do when writing about race and equity. However, we try to use our privilege productively as a means to center our participants' lives and the stories they wish to tell.

Lockett, Ruiz, Sanchez, and Carter (2021) call out white researchers who "fail to be critical of their own privileged position because they are often given the space and opportunity to perform research and publish findings on individuals who occupy linguistic minority space" (2021, p. 25). These authors make recommendations for researchers in rhetoric and composition that we find important: "RCWS researchers should concede the limitations of their cultural knowledge as an outsider, recognizing that their vantage point will not be as rich as those intimately tied to the traditions of literacy and rhetorical prowess under discussion" (p. 26).

One way that we do this is to listen for the lessons about race that our research partners choose to tell us. Here is one example: Lauren and Gwen are sitting on Gwen's back deck. Gwen is reminiscing about some of the inappropriate remarks her white neighbors have made over the years. Gwen recalls moving into the home that she and Chief own in a middle-class suburban neighborhood. When they were newcomers, the neighbors, who were mostly white, made remarks like: We don't want to see any drugs coming into the neighborhood. Gwen told them, "I don't want to see any drugs coming into the neighborhood either." She follows up: "And, do you know, there was a bust at a house down the street where there were all white folks dealing drugs." And here they had

told Gwen: We don't want to see any drugs coming into the neighborhood. The story ends, and they sit with it together, Gwen in her memory of the neighborhood dynamics, and Lauren listening. Lauren hears Gwen teaching her: This is the way it is with white folks in the neighborhood making assumptions about drugs and crime and then unapologetically telling Chief and Gwen a cautionary un-welcome-to-the-neighborhood. Lauren listens without response because she knows that her friend is telling her what racism feels like so that she will learn from Gwen's cultural expertise. In this instance, Gwen tells her story purposefully to make a point about how racism manifests in ordinary life. By narrating her experience on these terms, she gives Lauren a new perspective for understanding their writing and research conversation. This is co-interpretation in action.

In a related example, Collie shares with student researchers the task of comparing interview audio recordings to commercially prepared transcripts and making corrections for accuracy. Most participants in her studies are Black. Research on court reporting has demonstrated the prevalence of radical inaccuracy in the transcription and interpretation of Black people's speech, with dire consequences for them in the legal system (Jones, Kalbfeld, Hancock & Clark, 2019). Black and white student researchers read about this and take extra care correcting transcripts. Through her work with Adrienne, Collie now recognizes that this task is not just about ensuring fidelity to participants' words. After Adrienne had reviewed several recordings, she pointed out how the record of Collie's interactions with one Black participant indicated their distance, and thus the likely incompleteness of the participant's narrative. "She called you *Ma'am*," Adrienne said, and then she walked Collie through places in the transcript where, had this student been interviewed by Adrienne instead of Collie, she probably would have been more forthcoming. Adrienne noted Collie's rank—and more significantly her race—as obstacles to this participant's responses.

Representations of life, education, and writing experiences that Black participants share with Collie will differ from what they would share with one another. She knows that her whiteness occludes full knowing and trustworthiness. Collie can only partially redress this problem. Adrienne's authority about racial difference helps Collie accept that her cultural limitations, racial positioning, and institutional power can be acknowledged and mitigated but never erased.

TWO: RESEARCHERS AND PARTICIPANTS CAN DWELL TOGETHER IN INTERPRETATION AND WRITING

Dwelling with participants in the present, and revisiting interview transcripts and conversations, sets up the conditions through which we construct processes of co-authorship and ongoing co-interpretation. In this section, we focus on

two aspects of dwelling together and how those experiences and the strategies we developed deepened our meaning making. The story that follows of dwelling as writing together illustrates our becoming more fluent with possibilities for co-interpretation. We invite researchers to explore other opportunities for dwelling that can give greater impact to their co-interpretive research.

What do we mean when we claim that we write together? Since we are defining this process alongside our participants, we can be loose: Writing together can mean what our collaborators decide, and then we, the researchers, can learn from them. This doesn't require that we necessarily accept what they propose wholesale, but it does mean that we remain open to their ways of seeing. For Lauren and Gwen, dwelling together occurs frequently on Zoom. Because they reside thousands of miles apart, the virtual setting offers a gathering place they wouldn't have otherwise. Lauren sees Gwen and Chief one or two times a year when she travels east to visit family and friends. On those occasions, they sometimes work and sometimes visit only. Both activities are important. During a face-to-face visit earlier in the year, Lauren and Gwen discussed what it might be like to write together, but they didn't come up with a conclusive answer. They're figuring it out as they go. One thing they agreed on was that they would meet regularly on Zoom to "write together." The Zoom room became one dwelling space, but so are the other platforms where they interact such as email and Facebook Messenger, the Google doc where Lauren writes notes in comment boxes while Gwen speaks, and occasionally, letters or the phone. Each of these sites becomes a dwelling place.

Lauren and Gwen intended to write together for a long time. When they met after not seeing each other during the pandemic, Lauren gave Gwen a copy of the transcript from an interview they had recorded two years earlier. Because of pandemic lockdowns and personal limitations, they hadn't had an opportunity to interpret that part of the research. Their ongoing collaboration depended on them using numerous technologies, some of which were new for Gwen, but she was eager to experiment. So, Gwen held the paper transcript in one hand while Lauren shuttled across screens. Through this back-and-forth, Lauren developed a process of writing onto the transcript in comment boxes, essentially creating a meta commentary that was a blend of the two women's dialogue and Lauren's other thoughts in response to the conversation they were having about the transcript. They called this activity *writing together*, the writing being a process of talking with simultaneous notetaking within their dwelling space. This was the process they created for that occasion, aware that in the future they may write together differently.

Experimenting in this way, Lauren and Gwen moved through the written text of their former conversation and remarked on topics that had emerged already.

When they got to the subject of the food pantry where Gwen volunteers, Gwen interrupted the script when she said, "Guess what? On January 15, we lost Ronn Johnson, the head of the pantry." She continued to describe the loss while simultaneously reading aloud from Johnson's obituary: "Ronn spent 'forty-plus years working to make the city of Springfield, especially the community surrounding Mason Square, a better place'" (Henderson's, 2022). Gwen read from the obituary, then asked, "The big question is, what's going to happen to the center?" She described to Lauren how she found out about Johnson's passing: "We hadn't seen him in two weeks. Someone called my brother. They said Ronn Johnson just died. It was just, the shock. [People said,] 'What's going to happen to MLK [Community Center]? Who's going to take over MLK?'"

Clearly, the passing of a leader in her community was a subject of great interest and one that Gwen wanted to write about. After their video call that day, Gwen took the initiative to send Johnson's obituary over email. It was her first time sending a PDF attachment. At their next virtual meeting a couple weeks later, Gwen and Lauren combed through the article together, and while Gwen read and mused aloud, they transitioned from interpreting to writing together on a subject Gwen had chosen. The conversation was steered by Gwen, illustrating part of the principle of dwelling together. They spent weeks reading, interpreting, and writing in response to the event of Johnson's passing and its effects on the community.

When Lauren asked Gwen why she believed they should read Johnson's obituary as part of their writing process. Gwen said,

> I wanted you to see what kind of man he was, how giving, how concerned he was about the Mason Square community, such as the MLK Community Center, which is in the heart of Mason Square. There at the community center, there is so much going on . . . . [For example,] children whose parents are working use the MLK center as a place of learning, have access to computers, and to the internet. . . . Here's a man who worked at Mass Mutual. He was a director, a director of community responsibility at Mass Mutual. But he took it further. He took it out into the community. After he finished working at Mass Mutual, he decided to come to work at Martin Luther King Jr. Family Services.

The work of the MLK center, and the way Gwen locates herself as a long-term volunteer in its food pantry, are significant to her sense of herself as a person, and now, as a writer inhabiting a space of inquiry with Lauren. Although the writing process appears to be one of simply talking, reading, commenting,

and sharing stories, Lauren contends that this practice *is* their writing together because it is the process that Gwen has chosen.

THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN IS BEST WHEN IT IS FLEXIBLE

Because we make it a priority to yield to participants to make their perspectives prominent, we put ourselves in a position where we're always trying to figure out how their interests and insights prompt us to reconfigure our research design and the boundaries between us. We were taught to design tight studies before putting them into action, but we have learned from working longitudinally and collaboratively that openness to redesign based on our experiences dwelling with participants is equally important. In this section, Collie and Adrienne respond to a situation that altered their research.

Reopening

Collie had not planned to interview Adrienne a fourth time for the Writing Lives study. In fact, she had thought she was finished with that stage of the research in May 2020. There was a numerical tidiness that made her feel that she had done enough. It was the end of the school year, the end of her fellowship. As per her protocol: She had thirty participants. Six of them provided case studies. She had three interviews per case. Folders of writing samples were piled up for further analysis. But a year after the data collection phase was presumably over, Adrienne sent an email to the university's chancellor, forwarding it to Collie. Her subject line read: "IMPORTANT: The catastrophic effect on adult learners with the recent class schedule changes." Adrienne wanted Collie to know that the university had quietly and suddenly reversed their position about continuing remote instruction as the pandemic wore on. Over the summer, without advising sessions or advance notification, the university changed students' schedules predominantly to in-person classes. This was, as Adrienne's subject line indicated, catastrophic for students whose coursework had to accommodate myriad other adult responsibilities. She wrote to Collie, "I plan to continue to fight this as far as I can and hopefully something will get worked out for all of us."

Adrienne and Collie corresponded about the situation further, not as researchers, but because of their shared concern for adult students. Collie couldn't put this writing out of her mind. She felt that the email to the chancellor merited another interview even though she had thought the data collection period was over. It was a dramatic instance of Adrienne's characteristic way of sticking up for herself and others through writing, and there had been results. Adrienne agreed to another interview about this text. However, the fall of 2021 was complicated. Both Adrienne

and Collie were in their respective final semesters at NCCU with many life situations to manage amidst the stress, grief, and uncertainty of the grueling pandemic. It was months before they could both fit in a fourth interview. Adrienne had sent the email to the chancellor in June, and it was the week after her December graduation that she and Collie revisited this piece and the whole situation around it. It was important to wait for the right time in their lives and continue the study rather than stick to the original protocol.

They took their time. At first, they spoke unscripted. They had a lot to share even though they had been together just a few days prior at Adrienne's graduation party. The interview was two hours, the longest of the four meetings with Adrienne. Collie had prepared a semi-structured protocol for discussing the email. She also had selected excerpts of Adrienne's past three interviews. They dwelled on each of these before looking together at recent correspondence. Across the prior interviews, Collie had noticed Adrienne writing for self-advocacy and activism, and she wanted to discuss this analysis with Adrienne. Eventually, the two narrowed their focus specifically to the email with the chancellor. They lingered on the subject line so they could examine strategy and context. "Talk to me about that subject line, Adrienne." And she started with the first word, "IMPORTANT":

> I was desperate. It was very strategic in my head like, "I have to capture his attention. This is more than just an email from anybody, this is important. You need to stop, drop and roll. Read this, even if it's spam. You see the word IMPORTANT in that subject? You need to know this is coming from somebody important, and this is important." That was my immediate feeling. And that's why I did that. It takes a lot of guts to write somebody at that level [a chancellor], especially when you're a student.

Then Collie and Adrienne worked through the body of the email itself, paragraph by paragraph, re-examining the text. Collie read it aloud. She asked Adrienne, "What do you notice when you hear that first paragraph again?" And after reading aloud the second paragraph, she asked the same. In this way, bit by bit, Adrienne provided detailed reflective verbal annotation on a text she had written six months prior. This unpredicted expansion of the research added dimension to Collie's understanding of Adrienne's sophisticated rhetorical moves and her beliefs about this kind of activist communication.

To this fourth interview, Adrienne and Collie brought complementary expertise as they dwelled together during an unexpected shift in their co-investigation. Adrienne understood the high stakes situation and her own decisions in

addressing it. She could explain her strategy for producing this text and trace its lineage. She could also point to her other writings for different audiences that contributed to the power of the email. As a writing researcher, Collie marked this text as having another kind of significance, that of an exemplar for the theme of advocacy that was emerging in their joint interpretations due to the malleable research design. If Collie and Adrienne had ended their research after the third interview, Collie would have had something of scholarly value to say about Adrienne's writing, yet this fourth interview was motivated by an opportunity to co-interpret Adrienne's response to a high-stakes situation. Following up enabled Collie to learn much more about what propelled Adrienne to write on behalf of other people and in difficult circumstances.

REVISITING

In "Revisiting Participants After Publication" (2020), a chapter from an earlier collection of lifespan writing research, Lauren developed a theory of revisiting as a dynamic interaction between writing partners. She argues in that chapter that,

> revisiting participants and reflecting with them after pub-
> lication can be viewed as an important part of the research
> process that has not been considered in writing studies and
> that can offer a valuable lens for lifespan research. Through re-
> visiting, researchers and participants can work toward under-
> cutting a one-way knowledge-making tradition that privileges
> the researcher's findings at the moment of publication as final,
> limiting possibilities for partnership. Participants' responses
> to the published text contain possibilities for expanding the
> way they continue to interpret their stories. We can challenge
> the conventions of research when we foreground the insights
> of participants as they continue to reflect on and analyze their
> experiences. (2020, p. 99)

Revisiting Gwen and Adrienne gave us opportunities to question our assumptions about what constitutes a finished study. Revisiting grants a kind of permission to open work that has presumably been closed and to follow new lines of inquiry and analysis. For this process to succeed, however, it must be participant driven. Revisiting depends on the researcher yielding to the interpretations made by participants. We learn to listen afresh because of new concerns and insights that they bring to the researcher-researched relationship. Our experiences with Gwen and Adrienne illustrate how research and writing relationships gain meaning through ongoing negotiation when we dwell together

and when we redesign our studies. Revisiting makes room for the surprises that can emerge when we encounter participants again and find out what has been on their minds during a period (however long) when we were not involved in research together. Their current thinking, including reflections on previous research interactions, can shape how we make sense of the project and the ways we view our findings. These findings can take us to unexpected places where participants' experiential knowledge exceeds and reshapes disciplinary knowledge. We can learn more by consciously disrupting a traditional empirical research process as we question the value of that process and how it serves the objectives of our project. With an open process, we can ask ourselves midstream, what are the best methods *now* for understanding what the participants are trying to express?

RETHINKING IRBS

We chose Gwen and Adrienne as participants, and later, we decided mutually to become collaborators because of their wish for further investment in our research. For all of us, working together offers more possibilities for developing ideas across minds and making meaning in more complex ways. The introductions to our collaborators in the first part of this chapter illustrate the value of rethinking boundaries so that we can become even more connected with the participants with whom we collaborate.

We witnessed this in section one of this chapter in the example of Gwen's shift from the pseudonymous Shirley to using her real name as a co-author. The confidentiality stipulated by the IRB, which was important for protecting her and her peers when they were vulnerable as subjects of a study, became an unnecessary constraint that interfered with Gwen's autonomy to express herself as an author. In fact, Lauren consulted with the IRB office that oversaw the research to talk about her concerns with ethical treatment of participants, and it was the IRB officer who explained that our research can sometimes exceed the IRB strictures. Negotiating the shift in naming with Gwen became a matter of recognizing her authority as a writer who was not vulnerable and who wanted to transition into a different role from the one that she had previously inhabited. IRBs, disciplinary expectations, and our own consciences remind us continuously of the importance of maintaining good boundaries. Yet, these prevailing attitudes about what constitutes responsible research behavior can be restraining, essentially curtailing possibility and the potential for taking worthwhile risks.

While we honor the ethics that guide human subjects' interactions, we also respond to the leads we get from partners like Gwen and Adrienne when they have new uses for the research that are meaningful to them. The ethics we are most bound to are therefore relational to specific participants and co-researchers

even more than to the abstract ethics of IRB protocols. If we kept our boundaries rigid and opaque, we would not be able to transition into the kinds of trusting collaborations that we describe.

DOING JUSTICE WITH PARTICIPANTS AS RESEARCH PARTNERS

Throughout the composition of both our chapters in this volume, our assumption has been that readers interested in our approach will be involved in qualitative projects and that they may be attracted to the idea that such projects can spill out across time, life course, relationships with other participants, and around the twists of an academic career. However, it is not essential that readers are—or aspire to be—conducting longitudinal studies. While that is the approach to literacy work that is most compelling to us, here we are more interested in offering possibilities for how researchers can engage with participants in meaningful ways. We hope that readers will be left contemplating the quality of their connections, their willingness to revise a study design or protocol, and how that flexibility can make them better practitioners. We grow as scholars based on what we learn from the people with whom we interact. Relating to participants is a significant part of learning to be a qualitative researcher.

Our work should do more than contribute to scholarly knowledge about writing. The research process should be beneficial to participants, and dissemination of results should benefit people like them. We can consult with participants about what would be valuable to them and their communities.

We believe that co-interpretation can also be a useful methodology for lifespan researchers working within a shorter time frame. For instance, we can imagine researchers setting up a sequence of interviews that occur over a period of a few months, during which participants are invited to give feedback on the data collected, not simply to member-check or approve documents, but to contribute to the analysis. Part of the research process could include revising the data collection methods as we have discussed in Principle 3.

Often, our task is to follow the path of our studies, a path that necessarily changes course as a result of co-interpretation. We have shown this throughout the chapter when we look at the decisions our research partners make as they select the relevant topics and steer the conversations. We remain committed to confronting our biases about race and writing as they surface in various forms. We will seek our trusted partners' guidance about what matters in the work ahead both in terms of co-interpretation and in navigating our subjectivities.

At the moment, Collie is writing a book about adult students as researchers and writers that features Adrienne as a central participant and advisor. She plans

to ask Adrienne to read occasional excerpts to make sure Adrienne is represented in the ways she wants to be. It's also important that the book be legible to readers who are not rhetoric and composition scholars. Other students, like those who participated in Collie's study, should be able to read the work and recognize themselves, so Adrienne's perspective on style, representation, and facts will all be valuable. That said, Collie knows that the book is her responsibility, not Adrienne's.

Lauren and Gwen continue to meet. Their last encounter while this chapter was being composed was in person at Gwen and Chief's home, but it was not a visit devoted to research. Chief's health had been declining drastically, and in recent months, many of Lauren and Gwen's conversations landed on the subject of being caregivers to ailing husbands. Lauren was also a caregiver to her partner who passed away a couple of years ago. While their writing together matters greatly to Gwen and Lauren, the friendship matters too, in different ways than the research. Sometimes the two women spend their hour online talking about negotiating paperwork for different agencies on their husbands' behalf. Sometimes they focus on what they are doing to take care of their own health. At other times, the conversation stays centered on writing, and their stories spill out.

For us as two qualitative writing researchers committed to longitudinal case studies that do justice to our participants' perspectives, this chapter has given us a chance to share some of the experiences and principles that are most important to us as we continue to follow the twists and turns of our research trajectories. We have confirmed in these pages that research isn't ever done, even after publication. Findings are always provisional and open to revision, as are research processes. Developing partnerships with participants enables us to produce research that is *for* and *with*, not just *about*. That's an ethical stance that both of us will continue unfolding in our current and new projects. Co-interpretation emphasizes the *with*, and there are many different practices for doing so that we can develop with future research participants and partners.

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