Creating a (More) Reflexive Canadian Disability Studies: Our Team's Account

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Abstract

This article reviews a reflexive process undertaken by an interdisciplinary team of researchers working on a study about chronic illness in the academic workplace funded by a Canadian granting agency. The authors discuss the concept of reflexivity, offer reasons for why reflexivity is especially important for research teams working in disability studies, and broadly call on Canadian disability scholars to be reflexive. They contend that the personal is indeed political and that this needs to be fleshed out. Given that there is much silence surrounding the practice of reflexivity by disability studies scholars, the authors identify and discuss four challenges to putting the call for a reflexive Canadian disability studies into practice: both personal and structural. The discussion of challenges is speculative, yet grounded in the authors' personal experience of reflexive engagement and knowledge of the discipline of disability studies. It is hoped that this speculation can be overcome by fact in the coming years as Canadian disability scholars increasingly opt to incorporate reflexive processes into their research practices and make them transparent by finding 'space' to tell others about them.

Keywords

reflexivity, collaboration, positionality, qualitative research, disability, Canada

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In Canada, as in many other countries with major national research funding agencies, there are increasing calls for research to be undertaken using interdisciplinary approaches that ultimately require team collaboration (Barry, Britten, Barber, Bradley, & Stevenson, 1999; Nair, Dolovich, Brazil, & Raina, 2008). Canadian disability studies scholars applying to these granting agencies must thus develop collaborative teams in order to effectively compete for funds from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) or Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), depending on their research orientation. While there are many benefits to having a team approach to research, such as building positive relationships and gaining exposure to new or varied theories, perspectives and methods, there can also be many challenges (Nair et al., 2008). One such challenge is that members of a research team must reconcile whether or not their individual personal and professional beliefs fit within the positions taken by the team as a whole, or determine if they are open to new ideas, which brings up the fundamental issue of positionality (i.e., a researcher's awareness of how their personal and social roles, locations, and beliefs shape, and even influence, all aspects of a study from the questions asked to the analyses pursued). In the context of disability studies, undertaking a team or collaborative research approach could involve researchers with very different operating models of the definition of disability or embodied experiences of disablement, based upon very different personal and professional positionalities, coming together to address a single research question. While this diversity in positions and embodiments (i.e., how we live out our lives in bodily ways as informed by social structures) may very well benefit the research outputs and process, it may also simultaneously challenge them through creating roadblocks that can at times seem insurmountable.

One way to address the challenge of having disability scholars with differing viewpoints and positionalities work together collaboratively on a study is to engage reflexively with the research process itself. Reflexivity is the process of having researchers make transparent their "relationship to the field, the act of research, writing and the production of knowledge" (Haggerty, 2003). While there are many aspects of the research process that a team can engage with reflexively, we contend that engaging reflexively with team members' positionalities and how they affect the production of knowledge can be particularly beneficial in disability studies. This is because such reflexivity can heighten transparency within a team about members' varying personal and professional relationships with/to disability and disablement, where such relationships are often highly situated and can bridge the personal and professional in disability scholarship (Castrodale & Crooks, 2010). Reflexivity can also enhance rigour in qualitative studies (Doucet, 2008; Hall & Callery, 2001). Perhaps the best example of a team of disability studies scholars reflexively examining how their positionalities affect knowledge production comes from Tregaskis and Goodley (2005), whose published article offers a deeply personal and professional reflection on the nature of their collaboration and how their differing embodied experiences, wherein one identifies as disabled and the other does not, informs their collaboration. Among other valuable insights, an important point they make is that it was not until they made a concerted effort to engage in a reflexive dialogue that some of their feelings, and fears of inadequacy in particular, about their collaborative relationship had been brought to the fore and that in the end their relationship and trust in each other was strengthened by this knowledge.

Although the benefits of reflexivity are widely acknowledged among scholars in social science and humanities disciplines (England, 1994; Finlay, 2002; Fook, 1999; Lynch, 2000;

May, 2000; Mays & Pope, 2000), there is little transparency about how it is employed within

team settings through explicit mention in publications and reports. With few exceptions (e.g.,

Andrews, 2005; Brown & Boardman, 2011; Davis, 2000; Salmon & Bassett, 2008; Schelly,

2008; Tregaskis & Goodley, 2005), there is also little published reporting on the use of

reflexivity in disability studies, and much that is published deals with relations between

researchers and participants or communities rather than among investigators. This could be a

reflection of the lack of venues in which to publish the processes and outcomes of reflexive

engagement, among any number of other factors, and so we do not suggest that disability

scholars are less reflexive than others. In fact, they may be more so given the commitment to

politicizing the personal. For example, Goodley (2011, p.171) views the practice of reflexivity

as a form of disability activism, wherein "information is produced as much for others as it is for

ourselves."

In this article we aim to overcome the knowledge gap identified above through offering

an experiential account of a reflexive process that we undertook in order to unpack our embodied

relationships to disability and the subject matter of a collaborative SSHRC-funded study. We

aim to build on the important dialogue about reflexive engagement in collaborative research in

disability studies started by Tregaskis and Goodley (2005) through openly detailing the process

by which we undertook our reflexive engagement in addition to sharing its outcomes. First, we

offer a brief overview of reflexivity in order to contextualize our discussion, including the role of

positionality in acting reflexively. Following this, we provide a detailed account of our reflexive

process, including an explanation of why it was that we engaged in it, the nature of our

collaboration and study, and the important things we learned about ourselves and each other as

an outcome of this process. Considering our own experience of reflexive engagement and

knowledge of the discipline, we then move to identify some challenges ahead for enacting a (more) reflexive Canadian disability studies.

Reflexivity: An Overview

In the 1970s and 1980s an interpretive or reflexive turn in the realm of knowledge production within the social sciences and humanities took place in response to repeated calls to do away with the notion of 'researcher as all-knowing expert' (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003; Wasserfall, 1993). The turn towards a reflexive way of knowing within social science and humanities disciplines came from a growing consciousness encouraged primarily, but not exclusively, by feminist scholars that knowledge is 'situated' and co-constructed by researchers and participants alike (Haraway, 1988; Mauther & Doucet, 2003; Reinharz, 1992) and subsequent calls for researchers to write themselves into research outputs (Denzin, 1994). In response to the reflexive turn, ethnographers in particular started to take up the challenge of increasing the transparency of their roles in the research process as a way to increase their own accountability (Finlay, 2002). Since this time, reflexivity has come to be acknowledged as a fundamental element of good qualitative research as it has increased self-awareness and encouraged greater attention being paid to reflection, preference, and bias (Barry, 1999).

In its most basic sense, reflexivity emphasizes researchers' awareness of their own presence in the research process (Barry, 1999). A number of studies have demonstrated the existence of this awareness among disability studies scholars (e.g., Castrodale & Crooks, 2010). Reflexivity involves "self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher" (England, 1994). There is no single, widely-adopted definition of reflexivity that exists within the social sciences and humanities. In fact, Finlay (2002) has

identified five different types of reflexivity: (1) introspection, (2) intersubjective reflection, (3) mutual collaboration, (4) social critique, and (5) discursive deconstruction. Each type employs a different understanding of reflexivity and the reflexive process. Common to all understandings of reflexivity we have reviewed, however, is the core principle of the researcher or knowledge producer/synthesizer *critically* reflecting on her/his role in the shaping of knowledge and how this has an impact on research outputs, often with a focus on acknowledging and unpacking power differentials.

Reflexivity has many benefits to offer social sciences and humanities scholarship, and qualitative research in general. Many argue that being reflexive through openly discussing one's positionality and acknowledging its role in shaping the direction of a study can enhance the reliability of research findings (e.g., Doucet, 2008; Hall & Callery, 2001; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). Disclosing such details in research outputs also strengthens a study's audit trail, which is an important hallmark of rigour in qualitative research (Baxter & Eyles, 1997), and generally provides "a more authentic representation of self and a more democratic presentation of knowledge" (Hertz, 1996, p.7). Engaging in a reflexive process also assists researchers with discharging their ethical obligations to disclose their biases (Doucet, 2008). Finally, Hertz (1996) contends that a reflexive process also generates a new, rich source of data that can be of benefit to a study.

Despite repeated acknowledgement of the benefits of being reflexive within social sciences and humanities scholarship, there is surprisingly little explicit discussion about how to undertake a reflexive process (Bolam, Gleeson, & Murphy, 2003). Bradbury-Jones (2007) encourages qualitative researchers to keep reflexive journals so that they can locate the role of their subjectivity in the research process. Details are not provided, however, on how to structure

this journal or integrate it in the analytic process. Conducting reflexive interviews with members

of research teams is thought to be a way to explicate the role of researchers' positionalities,

including each person's own embodiment of the subject matter, in shaping the research process

and outputs (Bolam et al., 2003). For example, Brown and Boardman (2011, p.29) discussed

their use of reflexivity to assist them with understanding how their embodied experiences as

'disabled researchers' shape where and how they conduct research, concluding that while

"reflexivity is often seen as contentious, we have found it useful as a means to highlight some of

the particular issues we encountered as visibly disabled researchers carrying out qualitative

research." The frequency with which this type of reflexive strategy is employed among research

teams is unknown. In general, there is much to learn about *how* reflexive processes are

undertaken, particularly within team settings.

Our Reflexive Process: An Experiential Account

In 2008 we were awarded funds from SSHRC in the form of a Standard Research Grant

for the study 'Chronic Illness and the Knowledge Worker: The roles of gender and institutional

policies in shaping the socio-spatial workplace environment and employment outcomes.' The

goal of the study was to examine how academics with multiple sclerosis (MS) – a specific group

of knowledge workers experiencing chronic illness – negotiate the socio-spatial workplace

environment after onset in order to increase our understanding of how we can best support such

workers in their employment-related decisions and through effective workplace accommodation

policies (for more details of our findings, see Crooks et al., 2009, 2011). Our objectives were to:

(1) investigate if and how academics with MS who work at Canadian universities negotiate the

socio-spatial workplace environment after onset; (2) explicate the ways in which systemic

institutional barriers and enablers inherent in this workplace shape the experiences and

employment outcomes of academics living and working with MS; and (3) explore the role(s) that

gender plays in the career paths and trajectories of academics with MS. Our collaboration on

this study followed a 1-year pilot study that served as an opportunity to refine our research focus

and develop our team dynamic.

We approached the study from different disciplinary backgrounds, namely sociology,

women's studies, disability studies, and geography, though we had common backgrounds in

chronic illness research and critical disability studies. More specifically, between us we had

taught a number of disability studies courses, developed disability studies programs, collaborated

with other disability studies scholars, and published our disability research in prominent journals

within and beyond disability studies. Our relationships to the subject matter, namely the

experiences of academics with MS, were also highly varied. We saw this as a significant

advantage from the outset of our collaboration as our differing disciplinary and personal

backgrounds would likely yield a range of perspectives on the findings that would not be

accomplished otherwise. In fact, in our proposal to SSHRC we wrote (italics in original):

> …our collaborative approach to this study and the specific composition of the team allows us to *strengthen the interpretation of the findings*, *enhance the credibility and integrity of the analytic process* through adopting a triangulated approach, and provide feedback mechanisms for discussing emerging issues, thereby building *authenticity and criticality into our process*. It would be impossible to achieve such rigour in the analytic process if this study was not undertaken by a team. Furthermore, Drs. Stone and Owen's personal experiences as academics with invisible disabilities (stroke and MS respectively), Dr. Crooks' lack of personal embodied experience with chronic illness or impairment, and each member's different disciplinary training and distinct focus in the area of disability and chronic illness collectively mean that each member comes to the study with *uniquely situated personal and professional knowledges* which will add great depth to the process and outputs.

In other words, we attempted to leverage our unique positionalities in order to obtain funding for the study. We did not, however, at the time of writing the proposal consider what this might actually mean for working together in practice.

As we are not located in the same institution, or even the same province, much of our collaboration on this study has been through e-mail and by phone. We have endeavoured to hold several face-to-face meetings, believing that they would provide an important opportunity to deepen our collaborative relationship and assess the research findings. Approximately one-and-a-half years into the study we held one of these face-to-face meetings to discuss the findings of our first complete dataset, which consisted of 35 phone interviews with Canadian academics with MS. It was our first opportunity to delve together into a deep discussion of these interviews. Our plan was to talk about analytic ideas emerging from the interviews to inform the development of a coding scheme. It became evident during that meeting that our differing embodied positionalities as they related to the subject matter were resulting, at times, in different understandings of the core processes emerging from participants' experiences and ultimately our emotional responses to the findings. This left us thinking that some of us might be too detached in our reading of the findings to achieve a good analysis while others might be too emotionally involved to do anything beyond attempt to validate our own experiences. Up to that point we had not explicitly discussed this issue, nor had we engaged with the subject material and each other reflexively even though there was always some underlying tension about if and how 'the personal' should influence our work on the study. We used the opportunity of this face-to-face meeting to outline a reflexive process that we hoped would help us to come to a better understanding of our individual motivations for being involved in the study and hopes for what it would accomplish for academics with MS, and chronically ill and disabled workers in general.

The reflexive process we designed as an outcome of our face-to-face team meeting had four main steps. First, we generated a series of questions we each responded to, sharing our answers with everyone on the team. The questions posed of everyone in this step were:

(1)   why did you want to do this research, and what is your personal connection to chronic illness in the academic workplace;

(2)   how do you respond personally to reading about people's experience of chronic illness in the academic workplace and why do you respond in these ways;

(3)   how do you respond as a researcher to reading about people's experiences of chronic illness in the academic workplace and why do you respond in these ways; and

(4)   what is the lasting impact of your responses and how do you deal with your responses?

The second step involved talking about our responses and what we had learned about each other through reading the document. Following this, we then each posed up to two additional questions of each of our collaborators that touched on issues we wanted to learn more about arising from the first step. Again, the answers were typed and shared with everyone in a password-protected online document. The tailored questions posed of people in this step were:

(1)   you say you now look at the academic workplace differently, how did you look at it before you began this research;

(2)   do you think that having a chronic illness yourself would change your relationship to this project;

(3)   are there any drawbacks to your lack of personal response to the interviews;

(4)   can you imagine any responses you may have to deal with in the future;

(5)   if you were to characterize your involvement in this study to someone else, would you say that you have been a 'good academic';

(6)   have the participants' experiences made you change how you interact with the academic work environment at all;

(7)   can you see a way of working with your emotions to enrich the analysis;

(8)   can you elaborate on why you think this research is important;

(9)   if you are looking to the data to tell you that you're not alone or 'crazy'[1] in your experiences, how do you avoid not overly focusing on your relationship to the data as we start analyzing participants' experiences;

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[1] The questions listed here are verbatim as they were asked to each of us. The use of "crazy" in this question was purposeful as this term was used in one of our reflexive journals. The journal entry said that: "when someone talks about experiences that I too have had, then I feel connected to the individual and I feel an inchoate sense of relief that someone else shares my experiences. I guess I respond to shared experience with a sense of jubilation that I am not alone or crazy." This comment comes from her awareness that experiences of disablement may be marginalized through ableist practices. Use of "crazy" was purposeful here in order to convey a true sense of meaning.

(10) does it bias your view of the data if you think that a participant had an experience that was far easier/better than your own as a disabled academic; and

(11) how do you feel at this point in the project, are you pleased with what we have accomplished so far?

Our fourth and final step involved reading the responses to the tailored questions, talking about them several times as a group, and co-producing this article to make our reflexive process transparent.

In reading the above description of our reflexive process it likely sounds quite 'clean' and linear. In reality, however, it was 'messy', stretched out at times, and imbued with issues of power. There were times we had to step away from our reflexive engagement in order to emotionally digest what we were doing. For example, at least three months passed between each step. We needed this distance in order to think about what we had learned about ourselves and each other. While we spoke collectively at the outset about the form our reflexive process would take, one of us ultimately ended up proposing the process we used and leading us through the initiative. This raised issues of power and control at points in our process, as it led all of us to wonder at different times whose reflexive process this was. Although we did not intend from the outset to have a leader, in retrospect we agree we needed to have one of us champion the process in order for us to keep the dialogue going. Another hotly debated issue among us was whether or not we were going to be transparent about the process and its outcomes by sharing it with others in the form of a publication. A significant issue of concern pertained to the writing process. Would one voice or perspective dominate? A related issue was that of authorship. How would we determine who gets what credit for something that was both so collaborative and so personal? Addressing these types of questions was a major part of the fourth step in our process. In fact, over one year passed between when we finished step three and when we started drafting this

article as we needed to give ourselves distance as well as time to address important group

questions (such as: is this a process worth reporting on publicly, and if so are there any risks or

benefits to us in doing so?), rather than the individual questions we had posed of each other in

steps one through three, before feeling ready to begin the writing process.

We learned much about ourselves and each other through undertaking our four-step

reflexive process. While it is difficult to characterize the breadth of what we uncovered, five

broad themes synthesize the bulk of what we spoke and wrote about throughout the process: (1)

identity politics; (2) emotional involvement; (3) making sense of our own experiences and those

close to us through involvement; (4) distance from/closeness to disability; and (5) political

motivations for involvement. Regarding identity politics, we came to develop a greater

appreciation for how we had different ways of relating personally and professionally to our

research focus. A key realization was that we ultimately agreed that one did not have to embody

the experience of being a disabled academic to relate to the findings, which is not something we

had previously discussed. In terms of emotional involvement, we all reported having differing

degrees of emotional proximity to the study topic and that each of our levels of emotional

investment changed over time. There was even acknowledgement that this kind research, where

personal and professional are bridged, can take an "*emotional toll*."[2] Regarding the third theme,

it became apparent that we all looked to the data to help us make sense of things we had

witnessed or experienced. "*I approach each transcript wondering whether I will be able to

identify with what is said…I respond to shared experience with a sense of jubilation.*" Related to

this, our reflexive responses were hinged on our distance from or closeness to disability. "*I

cannot help but think about how the experiences I hear from the respondents might be

illustrating what my own life in the academic workplace might be like if I were to become*

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[2] Italicized quotes in this section are verbatim extracts from our reflexive responses.

chronically ill." Being involved in the study made us think about disability often, bringing it to the fore of our professional lives, and sometimes (by default) our personal lives. "*Working on this project has brought up all my old fears about the future, my future.*" Finally, through the reflexive process we all realized that we had political motivations for wanting to pursue this research. "*I want to create spaces where academic workers can openly talk about their experience (rather than pretend that they are disembodied); and I believe that this helps to open the door to progressive change.*"

Overall, we learned (at least) five important things about ourselves, our team, and our study through undertaking the four-step reflexive process. First, differences can simultaneously be a source of strength and a source of tension in collaborative research, and this needs to be embraced. A specific example for us pertained to the different ways in which we related, in embodied ways, to the focus of the study. Through our reflexive process we opened a dialogue for talking about these differences, the concerns we had that they were not always respected, and the growing awareness we developed that they could offer a meaningful way for engaging in analyses (e.g., if a finding resonated with one of our embodied experiences of the academic workplace then it sometimes served as a signal to the group to further explore this issue). This is also something that Tregaskis and Goodley (2005) found in their reflexive journey, wherein they put forth a call to embrace difference in their article.

Second, being reflexive can open up a space for sharing. While we endeavoured to make this space as safe as possible, there was always an element of risk in what we were doing, which we did not see as a negative thing. In our case, the process brought us closer and expanded the range of personal issues we shared during team meetings. It may also serve as a source of common understanding should we decide to pursue future collaborative ventures.

Third, it is possible to work together in a collaborative team when a topic is approached differently by different investigators. This was an important thing to acknowledge, as it meant that we would need to work, throughout the remainder of our collaboration, on striking a balance between our own beliefs and opinions and those that were reflective of our team as a whole.

Fourth, being reflexive increased our confidence in working with each other and the strength of our outputs. For example, it enabled us to understand why someone was raising a particular analytic idea or disagreeing with the others' interpretation of a participant's quotation. It also enabled some of us to come to terms with the fact that sometimes group understandings of a concept, finding, or issue are different from our own individual understandings, and that this is okay. Such experiences without doubt increased the rigour of our analyses wherein the processes by which we confirmed the interpretation of emerging themes from the dataset were directly informed by our reflexive process.

Fifth, there is a difference between championing the benefits of working with an interdisciplinary, collaborative team with differing positionalities in theory, as we did in our proposal, and actually engaging with a diverse team in practice. For example, above we noted that in our proposal we leveraged the fact that we had very different embodied experiences and relationships to negotiating chronic illness in the academic workplace. But, really, what did this mean in practice for our team, our study, ourselves, and each other? We did not think through at the time of proposing this study that another result of these different embodiments would be that we may understand the relative importance of a particular finding differently than those with whom we were collaborating. Instead, we unpacked this through our reflexive process and the subsequent dialogue it has opened among our team.

Looking Ahead: Challenges for a (More) Reflexive Canadian Disability Studies

In the previous sections we established that reflexivity is regarded as highly beneficial in qualitative research, with many in the social sciences and humanities acknowledging its benefits, and that engaging in a reflexive process assisted our team with strengthening our collaborative relationship while also enabling us to appreciate our differences. We are thus highly supportive of creating a (more) reflexive Canadian disability studies. However, based upon our experience of undertaking a reflexive process and our knowledge of Canadian disability studies, we believe there are a number of challenges ahead for enacting this vision. We speculate about four such challenges in this section.

First, there is the potential to harm collaborative relationships through being reflexive. While this did not happen in our case, this is something that disability studies scholars must be aware of. In disability studies, the personal is often enmeshed with the professional and political (Castrodale & Crooks, 2010). Further to this, there are also open debates about the role that non-disabled researchers should play in this area of scholarship, and also in disability advocacy more broadly (Branfield, 1998; Drake, 1997; Goodley & Moore, 2000). Undertaking an open, honest reflexive process in a team-based study may challenge or awaken people's perspectives on such debates and ultimately position collaborators at odds with one another, thereby harming the functioning of the team. Meanwhile, without being reflexive such differences may never be revealed (Tregaskis & Goodley, 2005). Thus, being reflexive is risky and leaving things unspoken may be easier; in this case, taking the 'easy route' may ultimately reward an un-reflexive disability studies. While this route may result in adequate scholarship, a dynamic element is lost. In our experience, the reward of opening up and becoming more transparent far outweighed the risk of harming our collaborative relationship. We see our position on the

potential risks and rewards as being reflective of disability studies as a whole, which is premised on a connection between the personal, the political, and the scholarly. Disability studies scholars need to be leaders in opening up and deconstructing difference, including within their own research circles, and should be willing to take risks in order to do so.

Second, if a reflexive process reveals that there is not a common understanding of disability held by all study collaborators, there is little direction on how to move ahead as a team to address this issue. There are many differing understandings of what constitutes disability, including among disability studies scholars, which are informed by varied theories and models (Davis, 1997; Imrie, 2004; Linton, 1998). To date there is no fully articulated social theory of disability that could move us beyond a discussion of the utility of particular models and theories (Oliver, 2009). Should there not be an open discussion prior to the start of a new collaboration about how all team members understand disability, engaging in a reflexive process that focuses on the subject matter of the study (rather than, say, methodological reflexivity) risks bringing to the fore differences that may be irreconcilable. In our case we learned that we shared a compatible understanding of disability through undertaking our reflexive process, though we did not take the time to determine this in full at the outset of our study, and so this was not something we encountered. While our understandings were compatible, they were not the same. The differences in our understandings were collectively informed by differences in our own embodied experiences, our political agendas, our disciplinary training, and our previous research experiences. However, as granting agencies continue to require interdisciplinary collaboration – and particularly in health studies, where this can involve social sciences and humanities disability studies scholars collaborating with clinicians and others with very different training backgrounds – while offering little funding for team development prior to proposal submission,

disability studies scholars may increasingly have to consider engaging in collaborations where there is little transparency about others' operating models of disability at the outset. The risk here is that oppositional or incompatible viewpoints on disability may only be revealed through engaging reflexively with collaborators once a study is underway yet, as we noted above, there is no clear direction for how to reconcile such differences. At the same time, realizing this risk could force the opening-up of space for dialogue and education and force team members to develop some form of conflict resolution.

Third, the lack of guidance on how to engage reflexively in a team setting, particularly with regard to creating a safe or safer space for sharing personal and professional reflections, poses a challenge to creating a (more) reflexive Canadian disability studies. Without creating greater transparency about how collaborative teams use reflexivity to advance their scholarship, people are left to figure this out on their own. The reflexive process we used was devised by us in response to our team's needs after first consulting with the reflexivity literature to identify models that could be adopted or adapted in our collaborative environment. We found no such models, and so created our own process. For us, this required expending time and energy beyond the reflexive process itself. As the neoliberal university compresses scholars' research time while increasing productivity expectations (Bauder, 2006; Butterwick & Dawson, 2005; Castrodale & Crooks, 2010), it is unclear how much time disability studies scholars will have to independently design reflexive processes in the face of a lack of existing guidance on how to do this, let alone engage reflexively with their collaborators.

Fourth, it is currently unclear as to how much the major Canadian disability studies granting agencies, namely SSHRC and CIHR, value reflexivity. Without the support of the funding agencies, it would be almost impossible to incorporate reflexive processes into

collaborations among Canadian, and perhaps international, disability studies scholars. In our case, if the research funds had not been built into our proposal and available to enable us to hold face-to-face meetings as part of our collaborative approach, it is unlikely that we would have invested so greatly in undertaking a reflexive process. As we noted above, however, it was never our intention to engage in a reflexive process. What we do not know is whether or not grant reviewers and ultimately the grant funder would have been receptive to having reflexivity-based activities written into our proposal and budget from the outset. The risk of explicitly commenting on such activities in a proposal is that they will be undervalued and the proposal may ultimately be rejected because of having an explicitly reflexive component to the study. Alternatively, planning such activities but not writing them into the proposal and budget maintains the current state of silence that surrounds reflexivity. Until the value that granting agencies place on reflexivity as a beneficial process and an indicator of rigour in qualitative research becomes clear, disability studies scholars will need to carefully weigh the pros and cons of incorporating reflexive processes in their collaborative study designs from the outset.

Conclusion

In this article we have offered an experiential account of a four-step reflexive process that we designed and undertook in order to unpack our relationships to disability as they related to our research focused on Canadian academics with MS. We undertook this process as a way to clarify our differing positionalities and to heighten transparency around the roles that these positionalities were playing in how we understood the findings of the study. In offering the details of our process here, it is our hope that others may adopt or adapt it in their own attempts to engage reflexively with their disability studies research collaborators.

We see this article as a broad call for Canadian disability scholars to be reflexive. Putting this call into practice, however, does not come without challenges. Some challenges pose as risks, such as the risk of harming professional and personal relationships through open disclosure. Other challenges are shaped by the very structures that enable Canadian disability studies scholarship to exist, such as the relative valuing of reflexivity in the research process when compared to other aspects of grant evaluation. Admittedly, while the challenges we have identified for moving ahead with a reflexive Canadian disability studies are somewhat informed by our own experiences, they are also highly speculative. Our reliance on speculation is necessary given the silence that surrounds the actual practice of incorporating reflexivity into disability studies, and particularly in collaborative research where there is more than one investigator. Our hope is that speculation can be overcome by fact in the coming years as Canadian disability scholars increasingly opt to incorporate reflexive processes into their research practices and make them transparent by finding 'space' to tell others about them in journals such as this one.

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