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Dr. Mum: The Mother-Researcher's Role in Collecting Data from Young Travellers

Catheryn Khoo-Lattimore
Griffith University, c.khoo-lattimore@griffith.edu.au

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Title: Dr. Mum: The Mother-Researcher's Role in Collecting Data from Young Travellers

Author: Catheryn Khoo-Lattimore

Affiliation: Griffith University

Contact: c.khoo-lattimore@griffith.edu.au

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Abstract:

Despite the many existing publications on the impact of motherhood on tourism experiences, none of the researchers have written themselves into their research. Consequently, we know very little about how (and if) the researchers' own identities as mothers impact on the data collection processes (and subsequently the data) they had collected from mothers themselves. While these studies have provided insights into how motherhood changes the way women experience holidays over the decades, our knowledge of how the dual roles of motherhood and researcher changes research on holiday experiences remain limited.

This paper aims to explore the extent to which the researcher's identity as a mother influences research work with children. I first declare my epistemological interests as an outsider located within the tourism academy, but also as an insider studying myself as a research subject. I am an Asian academic whose research interest is tourist and guest behaviour, with a particular focus on women, families, and young children. Not coincidentally, I am also a mother of three young children between the ages of six months and seven years. Through the lens of motherhood, I demonstrate how tourism research with children can be advanced when researchers reflect on their multiple identities.

In particular, this paper will draw from two stages of a qualitative project where children between the ages of 5 and 6 were interviewed on their family holidays. I adopt a dual role of the participant as well as the investigator. The participant role is that of a female mother-researcher, while the investigator in me becomes immersed in the field in order to elucidate for my audience (and for myself) the impact motherhood has on conducting focus groups with young children. In doing so, autoethnography functions as a method, and the focus is on understanding how motherhood can assist in enhancing the data collection experience. My autoethnographic data is in the form of my experiences with the studies conducted, my memory, my reflection, and subsequently, my understanding of those experiences.

Results from the autoethnographic data will focus on four dimensions of motherhood: motherhood and ethics; motherhood and access to quality data; the role of motherhood in the participant-researcher relationship; and motherhood as an epistemological element throughout the research process. This paper contributes to the current discourse of qualitative research in two specific ways. First, the work could be read as a reflexive study of an Asian mother researching family tourism, from the children's perspectives. This paper also serves to expand conversations on epistemology. Within the context of motherhood and researcher identity, I provide epistemological discourse from the perspective of a mother that adds to our existing understandings of knowledge and knowledge generation. In doing so, I have not attempted to categorise these epistemological emergences into specific origin. Rather, I have deliberately left them open for future scholarship, with an aim to diversifying current research ideologies and ontologies.