

The Need for Interdisciplinarity: A Community-Based Participatory Action Research Project with Forced Migrant Youth

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Abstract: The paper begins by providing a brief overview of the disciplinary/interdisciplinary debate, before introducing how an interdisciplinary approach is used to inform a community based participatory action research (CBPAR) project. Four key aspects are used to make the case for an interdisciplinary approach: problem-focused, complexity, objectivity/subjectivity, and the concept of *verstehen*. Each aspect is related to how an interdisciplinary CBPAR project can engage refugee and asylum seeking youth in the search for a more nuanced understanding to how they may be supported as they immerse themselves within a new community.

Keywords: interdisciplinarity; acculturation; sport; problem focused; complexity; objectivity/subjectivity; understanding; asylum seekers; refugees

Résumé : Avant de montrer comment une approche interdisciplinaire peut informer un projet de recherche participative d'action communautaire (RPAC), nous commençons avec un aperçu du débat disciplinaire/interdisciplinaire. Il y a quatre aspects importants à considérer pour défendre cette approche : concentration sur un problème, complexité, objectivité/subjectivité, et le concept de compréhension (*verstehen*). Chaque aspect poursuit le même objectif, celui de réaliser un projet interdisciplinaire de RPAC qui engage les réfugiés et les jeunes demandeurs d'asile à la recherche d'une meilleure compréhension de la manière dont ils doivent soutenir alors qu'ils s'immergent et s'intègrent dans leurs nouvelles communautés.

Mots-clés: interdisciplinarité ; acculturation ; sport ; problème concentre ; complexité ; objectivité/subjectivité ; compréhension ; demandeurs d'asile ; réfugiés

The contemporary is necessarily an unmapped, provisional field, because its disparate elements are only just becoming part of public discussion and record; it has not yet been ‘disciplined’¹

The formation of knowledge is a dynamic process shaped by multiple social, political, economic and cultural forces². The current formation of knowledge within disciplines is a creation of the western societies desire for a sense of order and the ability to privilege certain discourses that can determine the norms of human behaviour and what is accepted as ‘truth’³. Interdisciplinary research involves seeking to answer or develop deeper understandings in relation to research questions that lie outside the established boundaries of these disciplines⁴. Many interdisciplinary researchers argue that interdisciplinary research relies upon the existence of disciplinary bodies of knowledge⁵. A prevailing definition of interdisciplinary studies by Repko⁶ solidifies this stance:

Interdisciplinary studies is a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline and

¹ Joe Moran, *Interdisciplinarity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002).

² Richard M. Carp, “Integrative Praxes: Learning from Multiple Knowledge Formations,” *Issues in Integrative Studies* (2001): p. 71-121.

³ *Ibid.*; Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Science* (London, UK: Tavistock Publications, 1970).

⁴ Mieke Bal, “When arts meets history, philosophy, and linguistics,” in *Case studies in interdisciplinary research*, ed. Allen F. Repko, William H. Newell, and Richard Szostak (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012), p. 91-122.

⁵ Randy C. Battochio, “An interdisciplinary take on stress, coping, and adaptation in the national hockey league,” in *Perspectives on interdisciplinarity*, ed. Ali Reguigui (Sudbury, ON: Human Science Monograph Series, 2013), p. 273-291; Allen F. Repko, *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory 2nd ed.* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012); Peter Weingart, “Interdisciplinarity: The paradoxical discourse,” in *Practising Interdisciplinarity*, ed. Peter Weingart and Nicole Stehr (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2000) p. 25-41.

⁶ Repko, *ibid.*, *Interdisciplinary Research...*

draws on disciplinary perspectives and their insights to produce a more comprehensive understanding or cognitive advancement. (p.12)

While the usefulness and need to draw upon various disciplinary sets of knowledge to answer complex problems is not disputed, other researchers have pointed out that the interdisciplinary/disciplinary debate is primarily a Euro-American construction⁷, and that knowledge sets that exist outside of the academic realm should also be accessed⁸. This article seeks to join this conversation by situating a community based participatory action research (CBPAR) project within the interdisciplinary literature. To help bring the reader into the conversation I begin by providing a brief background of how disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge sets have been conceptualized and defined, before outlining how interdisciplinary research is conceptualized within the current project, how this conceptualization is reflected through the chosen methodology, and why this project benefits from such an approach.

1. Disciplinary Knowledge Formation

Since the time of Plato, philosophers have worked to bring a sense of order to the categorization of knowledge. However, the formation of knowledge into disciplines is a recent phenomenon that began to take shape in the early nineteenth century⁹. The ‘disciplining’ of knowledge began as scientists worked to collect and order all available knowledge, resulting in interaction between scientists engaged in similar areas

⁷ Marilyn Strathern, “A community of critics? Thoughts on new knowledge,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 12, no. 1 (2006): p. 191-209.

⁸ Richard Szostak, “Introduction,” in *Case studies in interdisciplinary research*, ed. Allen F. Repko, William H. Newell, and Richard Szostak (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012), p. 1-19.

⁹ Peter Weingart, “A short history of knowledge formations,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, ed. Robert Frodeman, Julie Thompson Klein, and Carl Mitcham (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 3-14.

of interest¹⁰. Communication between like-minded researchers became further organized and accelerated with the formation of scientific associations focused on searching for specific phenomena and explanation in highly specific areas of knowledge. These associations helped solidify the borders between disciplines through representing the interests of 'their' scientists and research agendas in competition for funding and recognition¹¹. The disciplining of knowledge was also reinforced by a desire for new discoveries and explanations of the world, rather than deeper understandings. To give credence to their discoveries, scholars aimed to become seen as scientists by adopting and adhering to the scientific ideals of objectivity, precision, and specialization¹².

As a graduate student undergoing constant development in my journey into academia, the university I have been enculturated within is one formed by disciplines. While my journey has occurred in the western part of the world, disciplinary associations seem to have ensured that the disciplining of knowledge has become a global phenomenon. Despite this, those who have sought to understand how knowledge becomes 'disciplined' still have difficulty defining what a discipline is. Chettiparamb¹³ in her review of interdisciplinary literature highlighted the wide range of criteria that has been used to define disciplines, ranging from scientific criteria (i.e., what objects are studied) to social criteria (i.e., a group of persons with similar interests) to

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Julie Thompson Klein, *Humanities, culture, and interdisciplinarity: The changing American academy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005).

¹³ Angelique Chettiparamb, *Interdisciplinarity: A Literature Review* (Southampton, UK: The Higher Education Academy, Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning Group, 2007).

learning and/or to research methods. Salter and Hearn¹⁴ provide a list of five attributes that are often used to help define the boundaries that differentiate disciplines: a) a constellation of topics, perspective, and methods; b) a prevailing approach to research; c) institutional recognition of the discipline in varying forms such as the creation of a department; d) the formation of a community of scholars; and e) methods of compelling adherence to the norms of the discipline. For Moran¹⁵ part of the difficulty in defining disciplines is that “disciplines are rhetorical structures which have a discrete identity only as a result of their differential relationship with other disciplines; in other words, what they are is defined by what they are not” (p. 112). Another difficulty that comes with defining disciplines noted by Chettiparamb¹⁶ is that the origin of disciplines is geographically distinct dependent on the discipline and conditioned by cultural, economic, and political factors. These external factors have helped set the parameters for how each discipline structures the production and distribution of knowledge; in essence deciding the direction of what knowledge is relevant to those working within the boundaries of that discipline¹⁷.

While the scholarly community has continued to construct the structure and defining of disciplines¹⁸, these changes have generally taken place at a gradual pace¹⁹. The changing shape of disciplines is often related to endogenous factors that impact the discipline or larger academic community, rather than the objects of their study²⁰. The relatively stable

¹⁴ Liora Salter and Alison Hearn, *Outside the Lines: Issues in Interdisciplinary Research* (Buffalo, NY: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996).

¹⁵ Moran, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ Chettiparamb, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ Weingart, *op. cit.*, “A short history...”.

¹⁸ Chettiparamb, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ Weingart, *op. cit.*, “A short history...”.

²⁰ Carp, *op. cit.*

structure of disciplines has allowed for the accumulation of knowledge in areas that have been deemed relevant by those with the power to determine research agendas within disciplines²¹. However, the increased accumulation of knowledge has become largely irrelevant to the vast majority of people. The communication of scientific findings has transformed from being available and comprehensible by the public to the current acceptance of a mere 20% of articles being of importance to 80% of readers, and these readers in large part being scholars themselves²². The relevance of this accumulation of knowledge has been further diminished by the privileging of statistical approaches to research which generally ignoring the meaning of information. The focus of this research has been ensuring that one's research falls within a pre-determined level of probability that the information they have collected provides a causal explanation to the specific question they want to answer²³. For many social scientists the focus on explanation rather than understanding has become problematic as they have come to recognize that this approach has not developed our understanding of the complex world that we live in²⁴. The search for answers to increasingly complex questions has led to a blurring of the lines between social science disciplines as social scientists have begun to embrace the need to shape their work in terms of what is necessary rather than what has been defined as the accepted approach to research²⁵.

2. Interdisciplinarity in social sciences

The notion of interdisciplinarity and what it means to do interdisciplinary research has become hotly contested as

²¹ Weingart, *op. cit.*, "A short history..."

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Edgar Morin, *On Complexity* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press., 2008).

²⁴ Clifford Geertz, "Blurred genres: The refiguration of social thought," *The American Scholar* 49, no. 2 (1998): p. 165-179; Morin, *op. cit.*

²⁵ Geertz, *ibid.*

interdisciplinary research has become more in vogue²⁶. The previous section on disciplinarity and the difficulty in defining that term may provide a reason for why the concept of interdisciplinary is hard to agree on. Adding to the difficulty is the mistake on the part of some scholars in their assumption that looking at a problem from different disciplinary perspectives constitutes interdisciplinary research. With funding agencies promoting an increase in interdisciplinary research, the formation of multi-disciplinary research teams has become the easiest way for researchers to signal their intention to use an interdisciplinary approach. However, these teams can become a group of people who are engaged in one sided-conversations; willing to present their own view of the same problem, but not willing to listen and mutually change to allow dialogue to develop. To engage in interdisciplinary research requires scientists to continuously reflect on their own position in relation to others, be open to a change in their method and direction of conversation, and to work towards integrating all insights into a conversation that all can engage in²⁷. Agreement and disagreement are expected in this conversation, the important distinction being that all participants are engaged in the same conversation rather than multiple separate conversations²⁸. While this conversation and development of new interdisciplinary insights may require experts from different disciplines, and as will be discussed below, non-disciplines, interdisciplinary

²⁶ Sally W. Alboela et al., "Defining interdisciplinary research: Conclusions from a critical review of the literature," *Health Research and Educational Trust* 42 (2007): p. 329-426.

²⁷ Julie Thompson Klein, "A taxonomy of Interdisciplinarity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, ed. Robert Frodeman, Julie Thompson Klein, and Carl Mitcham (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 15-30; Stephanie M Reich and Jennifer A. Reich, "Cultural competence in interdisciplinary collaborations: A method for respecting diversity in research partnerships," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 38 (1996): p. 51-62.

²⁸ Strathern, *op. cit.*

research can also be conducted by a single researcher who becomes versed in multiple conversations and integrates these into a new conversation²⁹. What is important is that the final outcome is a new conversation that helps to bring about a new understanding on the part of those who are involved in the conversation and other related conversations; in essence bringing people from different walks of life together to solve problems that require collaboration. I begin the following section by explaining why a complex question helps drive interdisciplinary research, why complexity has forced scientists to become more open to new ways of thinking, the need for those involved in the conversation to recognize their role within the construction of a new conversation, and the role that different conversations can play in this construction. These are some of the more hotly debated aspects of interdisciplinary research, but they by no means represent a finite list. The aspects of interdisciplinary research that I have chosen to discuss are those that I feel are most relevant to the research that is being proposed.

Problem Focused. Defining the problem that one wishes to understand is what Szostak³⁰ believes should be the first step in any interdisciplinary research. For some interdisciplinary researchers these problems are to be found in the contested areas between disciplines, while for others these problems are found within the communities that we live in. Klein³¹ refers to these as endogenous (i.e., originate within science) and exogenous (i.e., originate in real problems of the community) interdisciplinarity. Understanding the meanings given to the world by others is a question that faces scholars whose work centers around understanding and solving societal problems. These types of issues are one primary

²⁹ Repko, *op. cit.*, *Interdisciplinary Research...*

³⁰ Richard Szostak, "How to do interdisciplinarity: Integrating the debate," *Issues in Integrative Studies* 20 (2002): p. 103-122.

³¹ Klein, *op. cit.*, "A taxonomy..."

driver of interdisciplinary research due to their complexity. The drive to solve societal problems through interdisciplinary research has intensified after the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) called for universities to perform their pragmatic social mission through their research³². The nature of the problem also has an impact on the ‘form’ of interdisciplinarity that is engaged in. Repko³³ identifies these forms of interdisciplinarity as *instrumental* interdisciplinarity, *conceptual* interdisciplinarity, and *critical* interdisciplinarity. Instrumental interdisciplinarity is generally a form of exogenous interdisciplinarity and involves a pragmatic approach that begins with a practical problem that originates through the demands of society. Conceptual interdisciplinarity is generally a form of endogenous interdisciplinarity that is focused on complex questions that have no singular disciplinary basis and therefore require an integration of knowledge from multiple disciplines. Critical interdisciplinarity involves questions that interrogate existing forms of knowledge by raising questions of value and purpose. This form of interdisciplinarity aims to dismantle boundaries rather than build bridges across disciplinary knowledge sets and advocates for the inclusion of knowledge sets outside of academia. These forms of interdisciplinarity are not exclusive of each other as a complex problem may require flexibility on the part of the researcher(s) as the direction of research may change dependent on what is discovered as one begins to pull the layers of a problem apart.

Complexity. The layers of a complex problem require thick description to allow for new knowledge to come forward³⁴. Alfonso Montuori in his foreword for Morin’s³⁵ book *On Complexity* writes that he believes that this goes against most

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Repko, *op. cit.*, *Interdisciplinary Research...*

³⁴ Moran, *op. cit.*

³⁵ Morin, *op. cit.*

human's tendency to attempt to reduce complexity in the world by thinking in dualistic terms (i.e., them/us, good/bad). He writes about Morin's experiences as a member of the French army and his refusal to view all Germans as 'bad' people, arguing that the situation they found themselves in was much more complex than this. Morin felt that humans tended to avoid the anxiety that came with contemplating the humanity of those who were different to us. For the soldiers at this time it was much easier to follow the thinking that since they were fundamentally good, those opposed to them must be fundamentally bad, than to contemplate the complex reasons that had set them against those they opposed. The rise of the modern interdisciplinary movement occurred during a time when people began to become more aware of the need to face the anxiety that comes with living in a complex world. Newell³⁶ traces this movement back to the early 1960's; a time of open-ended societal problems in which the world faced social, political, cultural, racial, and generational tumult. Important to remember here is that as noted before, Strathern³⁷ writes that the disciplinary/interdisciplinary debate is primarily a Euro/American construction, and as such, the world that is primarily spoken of here is the Euro/American world. For Newell, an American scholar, the early 1960's in the USA was a time of complex social movements, with people feeling comfortable in expressing their displeasure with how their society was constructed. These movements included the movement for desegregation and protests against the American military involvement in the Vietnam war. Newell³⁸ speaks about

³⁶ William H. Newell, "The Intertwined History of Interdisciplinary Undergraduate Education and the Association for Integrative Studies: An Insider's View," *Issues in Integrative Studies* 26 (2008): p. 1-59.

³⁷ Strathern, *op. cit.*

³⁸ Newell, "The Intertwined History of Interdisciplinary Undergraduate Education and the Association for Integrative Studies: An Insider's View," p. 1-59.

how he felt that the rise in interdisciplinary research provided a research approach that could promote societal change in a manner that would avoid demolishing the current society, but rather transforming it in response to the needs of the those living in that society. This time of unrest within the western world brought about the realization that the world we live in is a complex one, constituted in the “fabric of events, actions, interactions, retroactions, determinations, and chance that constitute our phenomenal world”³⁹ (p. 5). For Klein⁴⁰ the inherent complexity in nature and society is one of the primary drivers of interdisciplinary research. The complexity of the world we live in has come to the fore for those working in academia as scientists have struggled to understand why previous attempts to classify our world within a closed system has become undone. This has become particularly difficult as the academia that many scientists have been enculturated into is one that strives for a closed world based on organization and order, rather than an open world that is foggy, uncertain, and prone to contradiction⁴¹.

Objectivity/Subjectivity. Adding to this complexity is the disciplinary focus on objectivity that social scientists adopted from the natural scientists, which has become problematic because as noted by Morin⁴², we cannot remove ourselves from the information that we come to understand. German philosopher and historian Wilhelm Dilthey, as quoted by Moran⁴³, argued this point early in the 20th century saying that “the world could never be known objectively and finally, but could only be interpreted; there was no such thing as a pure reason or absolute knowledge outside of human experience” (p. 119). The self that is included within this

³⁹ Morin, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ Klein, *op. cit.*, “A taxonomy...”.

⁴¹ Morin, *op. cit.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Moran, *op. cit.*

world is one that includes autonomy, individuality, complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity⁴⁴. For students in the interdisciplinary studies program at Wayne State university in Detroit the recognition of their own positioning within the work they did allowed for their learning to become contextually meaningful. The topics and lessons they could choose to learn about were made relevant due to the connection of these topics to their background life knowledge⁴⁵. However, for many scientists accepting one's role in the knowledge generation process, and the recognition of the power one holds in determining the chosen path towards generating new knowledge is problematic, as it challenges the idea this knowledge is of universal importance to others⁴⁶. Recognizing one's own role in the research process is akin to admitting that your conclusions cannot be taken to be universal 'truths' as they may change dependent on who is conducting the research. For some scholars this is problematic as they may feel that this removes their intellectual authority, as they can no longer claim to know the world as others know it⁴⁷. Interdisciplinary researchers, as Carp⁴⁸ says, should willingly embrace this challenge by approaching research with humility, courage, openness, creativity, and a genuine interest in understanding the knowledge of others.

Knowledge Formations. Following the formulation of a complex question that warrants an interdisciplinary approach, Szostak⁴⁹ suggests identifying relevant disciplines that can contribute to answering or understanding the question.

⁴⁴ Morin, *op. cit.*

⁴⁵ Andre Furtado et al., "To educate the people: The department of interdisciplinary studies at Wayne State University," in *The Politics of Interdisciplinary Studies*, ed. Tanya Augsburg and Stuart Henry (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc. Publishers, 2009): p. 66-84.

⁴⁶ Bal, "When arts meets history, philosophy, and linguistics," p. 91-122.

⁴⁷ Carp, *op. cit.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Szostak, *op. cit.*, "How to do interdisciplinarity..."

The identification of relevant disciplines is done through identifying key phenomena, theories, and methods that may contribute to the research process. Reliance on disciplinary knowledge and developing competence within each discipline has been an argument made by some interdisciplinary researchers who have denounced non-disciplinary knowledge as inappropriate for use within academia due to its lack of credibility⁵⁰. However, some interdisciplinary researchers have begun to recognize that the inclusion of solely disciplinary knowledge privileges knowledge that has been deemed credible by a select few who have the power to make these decisions⁵¹. This change in approach to interdisciplinary research can be exemplified by the change in how interdisciplinary research is described by those who publish regularly within the field. Rick Szostak⁵² in his paper on how to do interdisciplinarity wrote that a main step in the interdisciplinary research process was to identify relevant disciplines and disciplinary perspectives, with no mention of knowledge sets outside of the academic realm. Ten years later in his introduction to his edited book 'Case Studies in Interdisciplinary Research' he adapted his approach, suggesting that scholars should employ any scholarly or non-scholarly theory or method⁵³. Carp⁵⁴ was an early proponent of including non-academic knowledge sets, which as he said reminded scholars that the existence of multiple knowledge formations was a reminder that we don't know what we don't know. One beneficial aspect of the inclusion of non-academic knowledge sets, he said, was that this knowledge took into account local, vernacular, and cross-cultural knowledge formations. He urged scholars to listen carefully to those whose knowledge had been previously excluded and to learn from these

⁵⁰ Weingart, *op. cit.*, "Interdisciplinarity...".

⁵¹ Klein, *op. cit.*, *Humanities...*

⁵² Szostak, *op. cit.*, "How to do interdisciplinarity...".

⁵³ Szostak, *op. cit.*, "Introduction".

⁵⁴ Carp, *op. cit.*

marginalized populations. For Carp⁵⁵ the inclusion of these non-academic knowledge formations was possible if scholars developed an understanding of who they were seeking credibility from, why they were seeking that credibility, and the consequences of having or not having credible findings. Moving beyond solely integrating disciplinary insights would allow interdisciplinary scholars to move beyond bridging gaps between disciplines and include the search for new knowledge and learning new ways of knowing and new 'things' to be known⁵⁶. Moran⁵⁷ agreed with Carp and explained why interdisciplinary approaches to research are uniquely positioned to spur the discovering of new knowledge:

They can challenge traditional, outmoded systems of thought which are kept in place by institutional power structures; they can produce new, innovative theories and methodologies which open up the existing disciplines to new perspectives; they can help people to think more creatively about the relationship between their own subject and other ways of doing things both within and outside universities. (p. 182)

The debate on which approach to take in interdisciplinary research is still a prominent one; indeed, it was one that came up more than once in my cohort's theories of interdisciplinary research. The position taken within this paper is that scholars should be free to choose their approach to interdisciplinary research, but that this approach should be explicitly stated within their writing so that readers may be aware of the reasoning behind the chosen approach. Acknowledging one's choice in this regard means situating oneself into the research process and having the courage to acknowledge that because of this choice alternate findings may be possible for scholars who make a different choice in their approach to the research process.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Moran, *op. cit.*

Erklaren/Verstehen. The move towards including non-academic knowledge sets has occurred alongside a changing focus for many social scientists from seeking to explain human behaviours through universal laws in order to alter them to a focus on understanding the meaning behind human behaviours⁵⁸. Klein⁵⁹ points out that this not a new mode of thinking. She also cites German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey whose work distinguished the knowledge between natural/scientific knowledge and human/cultural knowledge. Klein called attention to Dilthey's opinion that human/cultural knowledge should be approached in an idiographic manner and focused on understanding (*verstehen*) unique and particular events, situations, and personalities. A focus on understanding our world allows social scientists to leave the door open to contradictory and competing understandings. This openness allows for a conversation between multiple, constructed knowledge formations that are all partial, historical, cultural, and gendered leading to a richer and fuller account of the world⁶⁰. However, interdisciplinary researchers should also approach these conversations with a critical mind and work to recognize differences in values, political agendas, cultural traditions, and religious animosities and account for these differences in the search for a common ground between these differences⁶¹. This is not to suggest that all interdisciplinary research should be focused on developing deeper understandings of our social world, but merely that this approach is needed to bring meaning back to scientific findings⁶².

⁵⁸ Geertz, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ Klein, *op. cit.*, *Humanities...*

⁶⁰ Carp, *op. cit.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*; Repko, *op. cit.*, *Interdisciplinary Research...*

⁶² Veronica Boix Mansilla, "Learning to synthesize: The development of interdisciplinary understanding," in *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, ed. Robert Frodeman, Julie Thompson Klein, and Carl Mitcham (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 288-291.

3. Interdisciplinarity and the current project

The following section describes a CBPAR project that uses an interdisciplinary approach out of necessity due to the complexity of the research questions/aims that guide the project. We draw inspiration from previous scholars within sport and exercise psychology who have not been afraid to borrow and work with knowledge and research approaches from other disciplines⁶³. Cultural sport psychology scholars have long advocated for the engagement of diverse voices in a conversation around local and idiographic approaches in sport psychology⁶⁴. One topic of conversation that this project wishes to join is surrounding how we have come to understand the acculturation of immigrant and refugee youth through sport programs. The conversation around acculturation has had a somewhat similar trajectory to interdisciplinary research in becoming more open and inclusive of different voices. While it would be remiss to think that some acculturation scholars have always been interested in understanding acculturation at a local and idiographic level through innovative approaches, perhaps the biggest push that helped this line of conversation to gain more traction in the realm of psychology was a special issue on critical acculturation psychology in the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* edited by Valery Chirkov in 2009. Although the special issue is focused on critical acculturation psychology Chirkov⁶⁵ opens his introduction to the issue by making it clear that the study of acculturation has been the focus of several social sciences including political

⁶³ Battochio, *op. cit.*

⁶⁴ Robert J. Schinke et al., "Cultural sport psychology as a pathway to advances in identity and settlement research to practice," *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 42 (2018): p. 58-65.

⁶⁵ Valery Chirkov, "Introduction to the special issue on critical acculturation psychology," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 33, no. 2 (2009): p. 87-93.

science, sociology, anthropology, and psychology. The aim of his introduction is to convince readers that “a new reflective, critical, cultural, and multidisciplinary approach in studying acculturation process is required” (p. 87). The following sections will use the four aspects of interdisciplinarity outlined above to try and convince readers that moving beyond a multidisciplinary approach to one that is interdisciplinary may help the conversation become more open to new ways of understanding acculturation for scholars immersed in this line of research across multiple disciplines.

Our complex question(s). We live in a dynamic and complex world, one that has become even more complex with the confluence of events following the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011. The number of displaced people worldwide has increased steadily over the past decade⁶⁶. Canada has provided a home to 6 600 Bhutanese, 23 000 Iraqi, and 40 000 Syrian refugees, amongst others⁶⁷. Refugees face numerous challenges including living in fragile family situations, social exclusion, discrimination due to ethnicity, religion and/or colour, and a lack of sense of control over their lives⁶⁸. Additionally, refugees face the task of acculturating to a new society, one that is often vastly different to their home culture. Acculturation, the process of experiencing change in cultural practices, values, and identities, that one goes through due to continuous first-hand contact with individuals from a different cultural group⁶⁹, is an issue facing both refugees and Canadians.

⁶⁶ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “Figures at a glance: Statistical yearbooks,” accessed 1 March 2018, <https://bit.ly/39cjl46>

⁶⁷ Government of Canada (GOC), “Canada: A history of refuge,” accessed 1 March 2018, <https://bit.ly/3ahpMrY>

⁶⁸ Ignacio Correa-Velez, Sandra M. Gifford, and Adrian G. Barnett, “Longing to belong: Social inclusion and wellbeing among youth with refugee backgrounds in the first three years in Melbourne, Australia,” *Social Science & Medicine*, 71 (2010): p. 1399-1408.

⁶⁹ John W. Berry, “Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 29 (2005): p. 697-712.

Recent research in Canada has shown that connecting refugees with sport at a young age and through their development into elite athletes can help them develop a sense of ‘feeling’⁷⁰. The missing link within this research has been an exploration of the life stories of refugee youth engaged in community sport programs in search of meaningful engagement with their new society. Our local YMCA, the YMCA of North-eastern Ontario has brought this to light as they seek to understand how to best provide support for refugee families during their initial post-relocation adjustment time. The emergence of this problem within the community is what Klein⁷¹ refers to as exogenous interdisciplinarity and requires a pragmatic approach to determining what is necessary to help bring about a collaborative relationship that will result in a new conversation between our academic team, our community partners the YMCA, and the refugee families who we hope will participate. The conversation will be aimed at developing a deeper understanding of how we can help all youth feel a sense of belonging to their community through their participation in community sport programs.

The complexity of acculturation. In his foreword for Edward Morin’s⁷² book *On Complexity* Alfonso Montuori explains how he sees Morin’s refusal to simply see German people as ‘bad’ people following world war two as a precedent that would help our world today in the Western societies treatment of those who follow Islam. The positioning of *us against them* has given rise to populist movements in countries, none more so than our neighbours to the south whose president has thrived on a position of protecting the *us* by keeping the *them* out of their country which he sees as helping

⁷⁰ Robert J. Schinke et al., “Finding one’s footing on foreign soil: A composite vignette of elite athlete acculturation,” *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 25 (2016): p. 36-43.

⁷¹ Klein, *op. cit.*, “A taxonomy...”.

⁷² Morin, *op. cit.*

to make his country great again. While this exclusionary sentiment has not been as vehemently spewed by Canadians, the rising influx of refugees to our communities has led to government and community organizations striving to understand how to help individuals from differing cultures come to understand each other and feel a sense of belonging to their community. The complexity in this endeavour comes from a willingness to seek to understand the multifaceted nature of this process and how it is developed at a local level, rather than seek to find a universal explanation of the best path forward for acculturation⁷³. Scholars in sport psychology have added to this complexity by pointing out that for acculturation to occur in a healthy manner it is necessary for all individuals involved (i.e., both those from the dominant and minority cultures) to be willing to learn from each other in a form of ‘shared’ acculturation⁷⁴. Seeking to simplify how research should be conducted into the process of acculturation, scholars in cross-cultural psychology have worked to reduce culture into bounded entities shaped by factors such as individual’s citizenship, ethnic identification, religious identification, and language preferences. This reductionist approach has allowed cross-cultural scholars to provide empirically quantified explanations to questions they have identified as important; however, as Chirkov⁷⁵ makes clear, “this understanding of culture completely ignores the symbolic and meaning-producing nature of sociocultural realities”. In other words, this approach reduces our understanding of acculturation to one steeped in the statistical

⁷³ Valery Chirkov, “Critical psychology of acculturation: what do we study and how do we study it, when we investigate acculturation?,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 33, no. 2 (2009): p. 94-105; Geertz, *op. cit.*

⁷⁴ Robert J. Schinke et al., “Acculturation in elite sport: A thematic analysis of immigrant athletes and coaches,” *Journal of Sport Sciences* 31 (2013): 1676-1686.

⁷⁵ Chirkov, *op. cit.*, “Critical psychology of acculturation...”.

probability or improbability of an individual or community fulfilling or unfulfilling a researcher defined hypothesis of what a healthy acculturation process should resemble. However, as Morin⁷⁶ makes clear, scientists' attempts to reduce the world to one organised by linear causations is becoming undone due to the complexity of the world we live in. This is forcing social scientists to begin to reflect on how their actions and previous findings have come to impact the actions of others⁷⁷. An example of this complexity is provided by Bhatia and Ram⁷⁸ who introduce us to Raju, an Indian-American biology professor who had been raised in Britain and Canada. Berry's⁷⁹ model of acculturation, one used prominently by scholars working in the field of acculturation psychology, would have conclusively labeled Raju as integrated into American society; an outcome that is promoted as one immigrants should strive for. However, after the events on September 11, 2001 unfolded, Raju, who is also a Sikh and so wears a turban, began to feel like an outsider in a community that he had previously felt integrated into. The realization that as hard as he might try, he will never truly belong in the broader American society is just one layer of the complexity that Raju now faced. This small snippet of Raju's story showcases how our social world is a dynamic construct filled with fogginess, uncertainty, and contradiction⁸⁰. The story also brings to light how our stories are one line of narrative in a larger story that is influenced by historical, cultural, economic, and political factors, amongst others. This dynamic and complex nature of this conversation is the reason why

⁷⁶ Morin, *op. cit.*

⁷⁷ Reich and Reich, *op. cit.*, "Cultural competence..."

⁷⁸ Sunil Bhatia and Anjali Ram, "Theorizing identity in transnational and diaspora cultures: A critical approach to acculturation," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 33, no. 2 (2009): p. 140-149.

⁷⁹ Berry, *op. cit.*

⁸⁰ Morin, *op. cit.*

Chirkov⁸¹ implores researchers to seek to understand the concept of acculturation better before attempting to create superficial models that purportedly ‘explain’ acculturation. He believes that this rush to explain acculturation is premature on the part of psychologists as we have yet to accumulate a diverse and rich understanding of how acculturation occurs and is experienced by different groups of immigrants. Morin⁸² is another believer in the power of understanding. He pushes scientists to see developing an understanding of a construct (i.e., the process of acculturation) as a point of beginning rather than as an end product.

Subjectivity. Another factor that adds into the complexity of how I will approach my role in the CBPAR project is an acknowledgement of the role I (and other researchers) will play in the production of the new knowledge that will be co-developed with the refugee youth participants. To this end, I have striven to introduce and situate myself within the methodological protocol so that I, along with my co-researchers and future readers of potential publications, can understand some of the storylines that comprise my identities and life story. The hope is that this will give future readers a better understanding of how my own story integrates into the new knowledge I have learned and am sharing within my article. My own knowledge constitutes another knowledge set that is included in this project⁸³. Discounting my own experiences as an immigrant to Canada and my acculturation into the community I lived in would be disingenuous and not allow me to examine how my own experiences impact the way I give meaning to the stories I will be told and be compassionate in my role as a learner. Acknowledging my own story also allows myself and readers to examine why I have chosen to privilege the stories of

⁸¹ Chirkov, *op. cit.*, “Critical psychology of acculturation...”.

⁸² Morin, *op. cit.*

⁸³ Carp, *op. cit.*

refugee youth newcomers to Canada, rather than those of other youth who may also feel disenchanting with the community youth sport programs available to them.

Knowledge Sets to be Included. While my own knowledge is one 'set' that will be included in this project, it is a limited one. As outlined above, the complex problem that drives this project requires that a diverse range of knowledge sets be included. The discipline that I have found a home in is that of sport and exercise psychology. Luckily for me, as a former student in the Human Studies program with a similar educational background to me pointed out, sport psychology has a lengthy history of collaborating with other disciplines⁸⁴. The emergence of cultural sport psychology (CSP) has resulted in an increased number of scholars interested in becoming more open to using a diverse range of research practices and methods of intervention, as well as considering differing norms, values, and modes of expression to those that belong to their discipline⁸⁵. The study of acculturation is no stranger to the need for interdisciplinarity, although at times this may have resulted in an increased amount of confusion. Research into acculturation psychology began to gain a following in the second half of the 20th century within cross-cultural psychology; however, the psychologists interested in this topic developed their work from the definitions and conceptualizations of acculturation developed by sociologists and cultural anthropologists⁸⁶. Indeed the definition for acculturation that is most widely used is an anthropological definition developed by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits in 1936⁸⁷. In addition to

⁸⁴ Battochio, *op. cit.*

⁸⁵ Schinke et al., *op. cit.*, "Cultural sport psychology..."

⁸⁶ Chirkov, *op. cit.*, "Critical psychology of acculturation..."

⁸⁷ Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton, and Melville J. Herskovits, "Memorandum for the study of acculturation," *American Anthropologist* 38 (1936): p. 149-152.

sport and exercise psychology, CSP, acculturation psychology, sociology, and anthropology, the current project is influenced by previous findings, research approaches, and methods from a wide range of disciplines including, but not limited to, history, fem-inism, pedagogical studies, sport for development, and sport management.

The disciplines outlined above, as well as my own subjective knowledge set, inform the opening sections of my article, but moving forward an alternate combination of knowledge sets will take the lead on determining what new knowledge is developed and shared. Acknowledging that we do not know what we do not know, the current project's knowledge generation process will be guided by the stories and voices of our community partners and participants. Carp⁸⁸ is a strong proponent for engaging in an integrative praxes in which researchers listen carefully and learn from excluded knowledge formation of marginalized populations and allow this new knowledge to guide the way we work. One aim within the CSP movement has been the development of a recognition of the voids that exist in current research and practice in sport due to the privileging of powerful voices⁸⁹. A 2009 issue of the *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology (IJSEP)* brought this discussion to the forefront with a focus on decolonizing methodologies that considered the voices of previously marginalized groups and previously unsupported or unknown research methods⁹⁰. The hope is that by including the voices of those that we will conduct research with we will be able to develop a deeper understanding of the localized nature of acculturation, while also fulfilling a pragmatic mission to provide

⁸⁸ Carp, *op. cit.*

⁸⁹ Schinke et al., *op. cit.*, "Cultural sport psychology..."

⁹⁰ Tatiana V. Ryba and Robert J. Schinke, "Methodology as a ritualized Eurocentrism: Introduction to the special issue," *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* 7 (2009): p. 263-274.

disparate communities with an opportunity to learn from one another.

Verstehen. A recognition of the complexity of acculturation has pushed researchers to become more critical of the way they approach their research, primarily because previous research had minimal pragmatic usefulness⁹¹. Scholars engaged in this work have followed many other social scientists in turning towards a more interpretive mode of social science aimed at understanding rather than explaining acculturation⁹². The current CBPAR project follows in this direction by seeking to understand the process of acculturation through the stories of our participants and learn the novel ways in which these differ to previous stories. Only by understanding these stories can we begin to understand how the social construction of the community is negotiated and maintained by different members of that community⁹³. Centralizing the participants' stories will also allow us to develop a deeper understanding of the changes, problems, and conflicts that our participants are experiencing as they navigate their meaning making of multiple dynamic cultural discourses.

4. The interdisciplinarity nature of community based participatory action research

The disciplining of how knowledge is produced resulted in a rise in the amount of new knowledge that was produced; however, because much of this new knowledge now goes unread, the usefulness of this rise in production is questionable⁹⁴. The methodology described in the previous section, namely CBPAR, seeks to produce high quality novel academic knowledge as well as fulfill the academic societies pragmatic

⁹¹ Chirkov, *op. cit.*, "Introduction to the special issue...".

⁹² *Ibid.*; Geertz, *op. cit.*

⁹³ Chirkov, *ibid.*

⁹⁴ Weingart, *op. cit.*, "A short history...".

social mission. As defined by Cutforth⁹⁵ CBPAR is “scholarly work undertaken in partnership with communities, draws on multiple sources of knowledge, crosses disciplinary lines, and is reciprocal and mutually beneficial” (p. 14). This definition brings to light the many characteristics CBPAR shares with exogenous interdisciplinarity, beginning with a conception within the community in response to a need for practical solutions to challenges faced by the community. Further, these challenges are often complex in nature due to their development in situ and usually highly dynamic in relation to local culture and social norms⁹⁶. Previous researchers who have conducted CBPAR have highlighted the role that researchers play within a research project, with Schinke and Blodgett⁹⁷ describing the subjectivity that researchers bring to the project as a “proverbial knapsack of values and preferences, driven by who they are and where they came from” (p. 89). A CBPAR approach allows researchers to be free in shaping their work in terms of what is necessary, as deemed so by the community. The crossing of disciplinary lines is merely the beginning of integrating diverse insights, that extends further to community members, in essence becoming a conversation among multiple, constructed knowledges that are partial, historical, cultural, gendered, and, perhaps most importantly, useful⁹⁸. Finally, the development of a conversation within CBPAR is with those who are different to us, allowing all involved to help construct a richer and

⁹⁵ Nick Cutforth, “The journey of a community-engaged scholar: An autoethnography,” *Quest* 65, no. 1 (2013): p. 14-30.

⁹⁶ Barbara A. Israel et al., “Review of community-based research: Assessing partnership approaches to improve public health,” *Annual Review of Public Health* 19, May (1998): p. 173-202.

⁹⁷ Robert J. Schinke and Amy T. Blodgett, “Embarking on community-based participatory action research,” in *Routledge Handbook of Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise*, ed. Brett Smith and Andrew C. Sparkes (London, UK: Routledge, 2016), p. 88-99.

⁹⁸ Carp, *op. cit.*

fuller account of the world, with a focus in this project on the process of acculturation. Hebert and colleagues⁹⁹ provided an example of this form of research methodology in their work with marginalized communities who have had many members become sick with cancer. They urge other researchers to not be afraid to engage participants who are different from them, because the inclusion of community members makes the translation of knowledge back into action much easier.

Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to provide the reasoning that underlies an interdisciplinary approach to the CBPAR project. I have worked to do so by providing my own interpretation of the current conversation around interdisciplinary research, how this project seeks to join this conversation, and why the chosen research methodology is appropriate for this aim. The form of interdisciplinarity present in this project is one that has emerged from a need within my local community for answers to a complex social problem. The choice to be a part of this project and how my own story has impacted this choice, and will be a part of the final shared story, is an acknowledgement of my role within the knowledge generation process. To this end, I also view the current project as a point of beginning, both for myself and the community, with no clear path to an ending, but rather one that is uncertain and foggy as Morin¹⁰⁰ says, but also filled with intrigue and anticipation. The intrigue and anticipation are partly due to the diverse number of storylines that will be shared and integrated and the deeper understanding that will come along with this process of

⁹⁹ James R. Hebert et al., "Interdisciplinary, translational, and community-based participatory research: Finding a common language to improve cancer research," *Cancer, Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention* 18, no. 4 (2009): p. 1213-1217

¹⁰⁰ Morin, *op. cit.*

sharing. Without an interdisciplinary process, the current project would lack the ability to give the meaning to our findings that will allow the new knowledge to be relevant and useful for the community we are working with.

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