TIME AND CARE IN THE "LAB" AND THE "FIELD": SLOW MENTORING AND FEMINIST RESEARCH IN GEOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT. Building on calls for "slow scholarship," we highlight the importance of time and care in producing rigorous, ethical research through our advising practices. We describe how feminist ethics and epistemologies shape each of our research clusters: the Hydro-Feminist Lab at West Virginia University and the Feminist Geography Collective at the University of Texas at Austin. We show a couple of ways that feminist geographers can adopt the "lab model" and use it to build meaningful mentoring networks, fostered through time and care, and in a way that both meets and transgresses the demands of academic neoliberalism. We then show how this approach extends into our fieldwork, recounting instances where the importance of mentoring over time and through a caring ethic surface. Unfolding over weeks, months, and years we show the value of time and care, both in deepening the quality of advising relationships and in creating mentoring relationships of trust and support. We contend that this better prepares students for the intellectual and emotional challenges of feminist that research and, in turn, strengthens that research. In the face of neoliberalism's quickening drives, we highlight the benefits and the contradictions of this kind of slow and caring "lab-field" feminist mentoring for geographic research. *Keywords: graduate education, feminist geography, neoliberal academia, slow scholarship, slow mentoring.*

Feminist epistemology attends to power; the work of power relations, our own narration of power through our research, and our commitment to challenging, disrupting, and upending injustices of power in our life and work. Methodologically, this calls for reflexive, situated, and transformative research, ethical engagement with research participants and environments, and knowledge production that is participatory, collaborative, and more widely accessible. Such an approach, we know, produces rigorous, nuanced, and complex geographical thought that responds to our most pressing social and environmental issues (Oswin 2019). However, this approach threatened by the fast-paced productivity requirements that neoliberal academia is placing on all scholars, particularly early career, untenured, and contingent faculty and researchers (Bono and others, 2019; Caretta and others, 2018; Pitt and Mewburn, 2016).

We know that time and care—fundamental tenets of feminist geography and slow scholarship—are challenged by the demands of the neoliberalizing academy; the resultant drives to quicken research, render it "efficient," and produce easily measurable and rankable outputs. The emerging literature on

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slow scholarship in geography (Carr and Gibson, 2016; Mountz and others 2015, SIGJ2 2012) and elsewhere (Hartman and Darab, 2012; Harland and others, 2015) responds to these accelerating trends by calling for self-care, daily resistance practices, and positive, supportive community building in our academic practice. Along the same lines, the literature on feminist mentoring (Datta and Lund, 2018; Oberhauser and others, 2019; Fem-Mentee Collective and others, 2017) reiterates the importance of making time to create personal, positive, supporting relationships and networks; of pushing back against mounting neoliberal competitive pressures. Our paper contributes to this body of work. Grounded in our everyday experience as feminist, tenure-track faculty in human geography at two U.S. institutions where neoliberal performance measurements prevail, we detail how we embrace and disrupt the "lab model" to strengthen and reinforce our feminist research praxis. We reflexively relay our strategies, experiences, successes, and challenges in teaching and practicing feminist research in the connected spaces of the "lab" and the "field." In particular, we reflect on the vitality of time and care, for building those relationships of trust, respect, and conviviality so essential for rigorous research and for understanding complex social and spatial processes. We assert that it takes time and care to build feminist "labs" and connected fieldwork, but that doing so offers both a defense and a strategy to create alternative research futures.

"Lab" Work: Slow Mentoring in Our Feminist Research Groups

Research laboratories have long been a prerogative of the natural sciences. Assistant, associate, and full professors employ graduate research assistants through their research grants, and these students conduct research with and for their professor on closely related topics. Typically, the research group shares authorship on multiple publications and other outputs. With the neoliberalization of the academy, narrowly defined productivity requirements have increased for all academics, including social scientists (Taylor and Lahad 2018). This includes for qualitative human geographers (Dowling 2008; Puawai Collective, 2019) who have more usually worked alone, producing fewer publications. Where statistical metrics of value dominate, merit tends to be associated with multiauthored, multiple article output, and high citation values (Kearns and others 1996; Domosh, 2015). This can have significant impacts for career progression and salary remuneration. While humanities-oriented, social science, and qualitative work may be cheaper to sustain than technology-intensive, lab-based work, scholars using these methods in neoliberal settings are now increasingly expected to draw in regular and major grants to pay for university administrations and all or part of the cost of graduate education (SIGJ2 Writing Collective 2012). Adopting a "lab model," with faculty funding students through major grants, is a newer strategy for social scientists both to strategically respond, and also succumb to, these pressures (Thornton 2015). Faculty using this model are supported by students whose projects now more closely

mirror their own, thus increasing their productivity by sharing the labor of time-consuming tasks and producing co- or multiauthored articles. This now long-standing shift has fundamentally reworked the norms of research, advising, and authoring for many scholars (Kearns and others, 1996; Meadows and others 2016).

Certainly, these neoliberal shifts in part drove the formation of our own "labs," or labs-of-sorts: the Hydro-Feminist lab at West Virginia University, and the Feminist Geography Collective at University of Texas at Austin. When we arrived in our current tenure-track positions, the lab-based working structure and dynamics were unfamiliar to us. We were each trained in settings where advisors and their students shared intellectual foundations, often with shared intellectual approaches, but we worked independently on different research topics and fieldwork sites. Sole authorship, with a publication rate of perhaps one to two articles per year, was the norm. While for some geographic subfields a lab-based model is common, we recognized the wider adoption of this model in each of our departments as a result of the overt and everyday neoliberalizing pressures of the university. We say this to counter any historical naturalization. We are told it was not always this way. Nonetheless, by the time we arrived, hiring students to support one's own research and working in "lab" settings had become the commonsense approach to producing rigorous and valued knowledge, and to meeting increasing publishing demands. Recognizing this, and following advice from our colleagues, we each began to adopt the model. This meant applying for internal and external research funds to support part or all of the costs of graduate students, who would now work on projects closely related to our own.

Our research groups have taken similar primary. We meet with our undergraduate and graduate students weekly or biweekly, working together on connected elements of a cohesive research project. We integrate them in via a range of research tasks we would usually do alone prior to tenure-track life: transcribing interviews, conducting bibliographic research, and field research, too. Over time, and success finding new pockets of funding, we were able to recruit two full-time GRAs each and get our research "labs" off the ground. We began to coproduce more "outputs" we all claimed credit for: posters, presentations, and articles, moving from sole or coauthored pieces, to a more multiauthored model, that included graduate and undergraduate student authorship. In this way, certainly, we were all able to publish more while responding obediently to the disciplinary work of metric-based assessment (see also Meadows and others, 2016). But we sought to do so in a way that emphasized collaborative work, moving us all forward together in our work and lives by sharing and connecting our research interests, fieldwork, analysis, and dissemination. This made space for more conversation, coworking, cosupporting while pushing back against the pressures we (and our graduate and undergraduate students) had felt to do so many different distinct jobs—our own

research, research tasks for faculty, grant finding, writing, and mentoring—at once (Hawkins 2014; Ginn 2013; Freeman 2000). We recognized in our "labs" a more transactional model of engagement, one that enabled us to reach neoliberal benchmarks for research productivity. But this setting required new ways of researching and working together that we found meaningful. We felt these tensions, at times embracing and enjoying the new model, at times feeling unease. We grapple daily with this complexity.

We reconcile our complicity in this unhealthy neoliberal norm (Bono and others, 2019; Manzi and others, 2019; Pitt and Mewburn, 2016; Mountz and others, 2015) by centering our academic pursuits around a feminist ethic of knowledge production—one that recognizes the long-standing inequities and injustices of academia. Indeed, a social justice concern to build diversity in geography is foundational to each of our labs. This is first evident in the choices we make around recruitment. For instance, the Hydro-Feminist Lab is comprised of two female students from Appalachia who are the first in their families to pursue a MA. In the Feminist Geography Collective Lab, we embrace an explicitly antiracist feminist geography, supporting all women geographers but with particular recognition of the compounded academic pressures faced by women of color and the importance of antiracist feminist research. A social justice concern is also central in our research practice. We focus on healthy, empowering, and transformative mentoring and peer mentoring, what we might call *slow* mentoring. This means that, as faculty, we resolutely push back against established hierarchies in academia. We try to create spaces where we can all ask for help, ideas, and support, fostering peer mentoring and mentoring "up" and "down" life-course stages. For example, in our lab meetings we discuss the progression of course work and research. But we also check in about our everyday ups and downs, structural challenges of academia expressed in the everyday. So often unspoken and unaddressed, these nonetheless can sharply affect each of our working lives profoundly. These meetings are fundamental not only for following the development of students' research and work, but also in disrupting hierarchical relationships by creating a sense of openness, informality, and shared responsibility for the group. By doing this we pragmatically challenge the meritocratic neoliberal ideas of a "super hero" academic (Pitt and Mewburn 2016), acknowledging that such norms are unhealthy. Instead, we encourage students to create healthy work habits, connecting committed and engaged work with rest and self-care (Caretta and others, 2017). Recognizing this is not simply a choice students can make without major structural shifts in the direction of academia, we instead structure our workload together to support one another, developing strategies to do academic research differently. For example we create ways to share and streamline work, support each other in meeting deadlines. And we take turns in sharing different kinds of tasks, balancing out between us those that are more tedious and more intellectually fun. We workshop each others' and guests' papers and grant

applications, learn how to write abstracts and organize AAG panels, and strategize on job market and grad school application success. But we try to do so in ways that disrupt established unhealthy norms, for example by fostering collaboration rather than competition. We participate at conferences with our students introducing them to networks of feminist geographers, inviting them to speak at research meetings with external collaborators, and mentoring them towards publication of their own research. Lastly, in each of our groups we understand that visibility is vital to our professional survival. We are vocal about our successes, including our neoliberal outputs like awards, publications, presentations, and short films. We take up space in this way to amplify the communities we are working with and their stories, to attract into geography a more diverse new generation of researchers, and of course to gain institutional and academic recognition and respect as we approach tenure.

In these ways, mirroring but also *contra* to the quickening drives of neoliberalism, we structure our "labs" as our way to slow down. In this minor move we seek to retain, after Mountz and others, a "commitment to good scholarship and a feminist politics of resistance to the accelerated timelines of the neoliberal university" (2015, 1238). This extends into our fieldwork pedagogy, as we detail below. Here, we present select episodes from our fieldwork where we put into practice our commitment to "slowing down"—both as an emphasis on taking time to produce quality work, and creating meaningful relationships with both our students and study participants. In particular, we highlight examples of this kind of feminist mentoring ethic, one committed to fostering healthy and transformative research and researchers.

Time and Care: Slow Mentoring in the "Field"

Between 2015 and 2017, we each received funding to support our qualitative field research. Funding came with clear benefits and new demands. While research support is invaluable, our grants came with extensive administrative responsibilities, in line with the new lab models we had adopted. This included the management (not just advising) of student research, space-management, more complex budgets, and varied reporting obligations. In line with neoliberal benchmarking pressures, each grant also had to be used within a specific time period (between 1 and 3 years) and result in a series of academic publications. These would be the primary form of merit assessment for our tenure review. To keep up with our standing teaching, service, and grant-finding obligations, the work would take place in evenings and weekends for Martina, and over two summers for Caroline. Martina would conduct sixty in-depth interviews on unconventional oil and gas extraction in northwestern West Virginia in the course of four months, working collaboratively with other departments and the community, and disseminating results by the end of that year. Caroline would recruit one new graduate student and three Ugandan research collaborators to study the global fashion and hair trade in Uganda and South Sudan conducting

surveys, interviews, and focus groups with hundreds of respondents in two international field sites.

With increasing pressures to publish in shorter time frames, the time-consuming process of primary data collection is also compressed. These demands result in trying, or being required, to do the same amount of work in less time and can prompt extractive, transactional, competitive, and exploitative relationships with students and their labor (Freeman 2000; Ginn 2013; Hawkins and others 2014). These dynamics were exemplified in our demanding field research schedules. For Martina a typical fieldwork day consisted of an early morning meet-up, a drive of one to two hours, two to three interviews and returning home late in the afternoon. For Caroline, field research periods spanned a month or two, with most mornings spent in the archives and afternoons and evenings spent conducting primary data collection. For our students and ourselves, these were intense days of colearning. Students observed us organizing interviews, searching for secondary data, conducting interviews and focus groups, and participating in public meetings. In time-compressed fieldwork periods, we used periods of supposed rest—drives, lunches, weekend breaks—to go over the schedule, the interviewees' profiles, and other projects we were working on, training students, supervising their related thesis work, and reviewing in-process research findings. We encouraged students to take time at home or the guesthouse, after collecting data, to write out their notes and reflections about the day so that those thoughts, so valuable in crafting a thesis, would not be lost amidst the next day's new demands. We felt the pressure of our work, and we transferred that pressure to them. In finding these new pockets of time to work we inadvertently trained our students them in a more productive practice of self-discipline. We felt the quickening imperatives of neoliberalism.

While the field experience was instructive for students, its pace was emotionally and physically demanding. We worked, imperfectly, to push back against these outcomes by centering the kinds of feminist mentoring efforts we had fostered in our labs. For us the period of field research is an intensive opportunity for feminist method/ological pedagogy. Our students observe us relating with people, carefully asking questions around potentially sensitive issues or, when the respondents showed signs of potential unease, respecting this and changing track (even though questions were included in the IRB approved interview guide). Witnessing us making on-the-spot judgements, but then also having the time and space to reflect on those decisions, is invaluable for our students' ethical evolution as feminist researchers. But as part of this feminist pedagogy, we have also made time in the "field" to slow down.

In part the very nature of our field research creates openings for this intervention. The forced break from home and work communications brought on by road and plane travel, time zone changes, and irregular or unpredictable Internet access, as alienating and stressful as they were, could also open up

spaces for building new mentoring relationships in the field. For Martina, conducting field research in a site an hour or so drive from home base, the car journeys with her student opened up this space. For Caroline, working in Uganda for weeks or months at a time, this time occurred in the evenings at the guesthouse or during breaks from archival research in the library. In the car, over piles of old newspapers, or at meals and tea breaks we sought to connect with our students in ways that, but for the lab spaces we had begun to carve out, were otherwise too challenging to do in our daily working environments at university. We passed time with our students, mulling over the less strictly "academic": professional and personal goals, hopes, anxieties, and joys; tracing a slow, feminist mentoring ethic from our labs and into the "field."

For instance, in her first research project as an assistant professor, Martina found her mind drifting while she was doing an interview, or informally networking. She would start thinking about the next class she had to teach, meetings the following day, or emails she had to respond to. Being present was hard, but the car proved to be a perfect enclosed environment in which she could give her undivided attention to her student, to take the time to introduce her to the practice of fieldwork. While driving to or from research sites, Martina would recall episodes from previous fieldwork and her own time in graduate school openly, sharing the nature of her schedule, and the competing demands for my time between research, writing, teaching, and applying for grants. Her directness was echoed by her student, who sought advice not only on study related matters, but also on how to reconcile school obligations with her private life. Still grappling with this, Martina suggested tips for life-work balance. In challenging the never-ending feel of contemporary academic work and the celebration of busyness, Martina encouraged her to take time off during school breaks. Spending time together in these ways enabled us to get to know one another and, in a true feminist way, unraveling, a little, the hierarchical relationship between students, their advisors, and our research collaborators.

This kind of connection is also central for Caroline, and has extended to the Ugandan research collaborators she works with. After two field seasons working with Kasfah Birungi, an archivist at Makerere University, Caroline and her research assistant were invited to spend the weekend with her family in a town several hours drive away. The trip would mean three days "off" field research. She valued these kinds of visits, which were central to her past ethnographic research. But under new time pressures on the tenure track, taking the trip prompted some anxiety. She felt under great pressure to "complete" data collection, get back to her infant son, and pick up on her writing work there. She had politely declined several times. But in a moment of reflection with her student, and following longstanding feminist geographic arguments, she realized the importance of passing quality time with her collaborator. They spent a day preparing together, buying gifts and organizing transportation, rescheduling

focus groups and interviews and set off. During the visit they attended Kasfah's children's visitation day at his boarding school, visited with her parents, nieces, nephews, and cousins at their village, cooked, ate, played cards, and laughed together with her mum and sisters. They spent time away from work. Those three days were intense, fun, and deeply meaningful. And in the long term, making time for one another improved the quality of our research, deepening our ties as a research community together. But it did something more, humanizing our work by recentering the intellectual and ethical centrality of friendship, connection, and responsibility.

While care for respondents is fundamental to feminist research and mentoring (Oberhauser and others, 2019; Lund and Datta 2018), less acknowledged in the literature are the health impacts of new neoliberal pressures in academia (Peake and Mullings 2016) and the importance of self-care (Puawai Collective, 2019; Jokinen and others, 2016; Mullings and others 2016). While this issue surfaces for our students and ourselves in many and varied ways we find feminist mentoring strategies offer ways to respond. One, linked here to harassment in the field, is insightful. Reading over an transcript from her project, Martina realized that her student had sat through a demeaning and condescending interview with a gatekeeper. It brought forward old memories of Martina's own experiences of harassment and disrespect in the field. While she could have let the respondents' behavior go, filing it as a learning experience not to be dwelled upon, she instead made a point to review the transcript with her student. Together they discussed moments where the respondent had crossed the line. By showing her student how she had been ill-treated, Martina highlighted the importance of self-care in the research process. And she made clear that they need not accept disrespectful behavior for the sake of completing one more interview.

For Caroline, attending to emotional and physical well-being has also become an important part of day-to-day life during field research. But it is a practice prompted not by her, but by her students. Working with her first (then undergraduate) student in [Uganda fieldsite], she was attentive to issues of safety and well-being, for example around road travel and work in high petty-crime settings. But she had not spent much time thinking about emotional self-care. As her relationship with students evolved and strengthened, she realized that emotional vulnerability, including anxiety and shyness in research encounters, were often heightened in stressful research settings. While complex, recognizing these challenges is part of a healthy approach to fieldwork and a caring mentorship. The working relationship between Caroline and that student evolved to account for this. She had her student shadow her as she set up and conducted interviews and focus groups for the first few weeks of research. She then gave her responsibility and structured freedom to take the lead. These strategies helped address the students anxiety and shyness in research settings, and helped her to slowly build confidence. We complemented this with daily

check-ins, diary writing, support in (and the opportunity to withdraw from) challenging research tasks, and respect for holistic well-being strategies. Two years later, and by then in our graduate program, the student took the lead guiding our new undergraduate in field research. She copied and developed Caroline's slow strategies of collaboration, fostering strong relationships. Her own insights and experiences overcoming challenges in fieldwork deepened their effectiveness, making the research process more emotionally and physically healthy.

These instances strengthened our ties to one another, providing a supportive environment for our students as they embarked on their first research experiences. This time was invaluable to producing feminist research: rigorous and reflexive. Yet we also tried to use this time to build bonds that would support both rigorous critical research and resilient, healthier researchers and research relationships. In these modest ways and others (Jokinen and others, 2016; Caretta and others, 2018) we work, imperfectly to push back against these outcomes. We do so, in part, centering these kinds of "slow mentoring" efforts in the lab and the field.

Conclusion

Our paper joins the now burgeoning body of critical work on our neoliberalizing academy Fem-Mentee its transformation of our work-lives, and some of the ways we, as feminist geographers, work within, and negotiate, these pressures (for example, Bono and others 2019; Puawai Collective 2019; Manzi and others 2019; Taylor and Lahad 2018; Fem Mentee Collective and others 2017). We argue that neoliberal pressures heighten the pace and desired "productivity" of research, including field research. This can prompt extractive, transactional, competitive, and exploitative relationships with students and their labor. We balance these demands with a feminist commitment to time and care in our research relationships. Our slow time together honed our students' feminist practice of caring and ethical research, deepening and complicating it beyond what they could learn in the classroom from methodology texts.

Our slow, feminist mentoring ethic is made possible by many connected subjects: ourselves, our students, our research collaborators and participants, and those that care for us. We assert that it takes *time and care* to build these relationships of trust, respect, and conviviality ethically central for our work and so essential for understanding complex social and spatial processes. And, while are each compromised by neoliberal academic imperatives, we find our different spaces of feminist research offer both a defense and a strategy to build alternative research futures.

We opened this paper with a discussion of each of our feminist geography "labs," new spaces we have created to foster graduate learning and structure our fieldwork. Each emerged from neoliberal pressures to increase our "outputs," to take on greater responsibilities for funding students' work, and the

operations of our wider institutions. In this new academic common sense, running a "lab" made our work legible to colleagues and administrators, provided us with community space to work in this high-pressure setting, and to have that work be recognized and valued as we approach tenure. While it has been deeply meaningful, and often great fun, it is an endeavor we have undertaken with unease. We recognize that, in many ways, our adoption of the "lab model" reinforces exactly the kinds of knowledge, research practices, and outputs that get to be valued in today's academy. In mimicking the lab model, we reassert a masculinized (and male-dominated) model of scientific research more highly valued than qualitative, humanistic, critical and/or theoretical work that more commonly deploys other practices of knowledge production. As such we reinforce the status quo of unhealthy, neoliberal forms of production, so vital now for tenure. In this sense, our labs are normative. But they are also transgressive. We push back against meritocratic narratives and competition. Instead we center a feminist ethics of time and care with students creating, we believe, more collaborative and healthy academic spaces. We close with recognition that slow mentorship is also labor. It can be enriching but also emotionally and physically demanding, taking more of our time while "making time," building familial and meaningful relationships, whilst eating into the time we have for rest, family, and time away, truly away, from work. In that sense our slow mentoring efforts are strategies to work *within* neoliberal constraints, to do so in a way that builds healthier research relationships, and thus more quality research findings– a strategy with its own limitations, frustrations, and hopeful possibilities. We work, as ever, within this contradiction.

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