



# **Friendship as a Methodology: Multimodal cogenerative study of motherscholar wellbeing**

A.S. CohenMiller & Denise Demers  
Presentation for The Qualitative Report Conference  
Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, January 12, 2018

# Where it all began

October 21, 2016

Mother Scholars

Scholarship/Anna CohenMiller - MOTHERSCHOLARS x



**Denise Demers** <denised@uca.edu>

to Anna.CohenMill. ▾

10/21/16



I just finished reading your PPT from your ethnography of Inside Out.....and LOVED it! May I just say, well done! I am part of that study...without really being part of it. My dissertation was very similar and I want to be able to use some of your findings for my own research. Maybe in the future we might be able to work on something similar. I teach at the University of Central Arkansas....I'm sure the sentiment is the same although the geographical area is vastly different.

Thanks for sharing your research!



**Anna CohenMiller** <anna.cohenmiller@nu.edu.kz>

to me ▾

10/26/16



Hi Denise,

Thank you so much for reaching out!! I feel so humbled that you took the time to read my work and to contact me. Interestingly, I have found that many of us [motherscholars](#), we first get a chance to meet each other in this type of way. So you do work, or did, on this topic? I would be really interested to read more or hear more about it. And absolutely, I would LOVE to collaborate :)

Looking forward to chatting!

All my best,

Anna

# Let Collaboration Begin - A Topic is Born



**Anna CohenMiller** <anna.cohenmiller@nu.edu.kz>

11/10/16 ☆



to me ▾

This is so perfect Denise that I was just in shock reading it. I've been doing research on a multiyear international grant on student wellbeing in Kazakhstan. So while that looked primarily on developing a scale for assessing wellbeing for students in lower grades, the concept of wellbeing has been on my radar a lot lately.

Let's start something!

All my best,

*Anna*

--

**A. S. CohenMiller, PhD**

[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/A\\_S\\_Cohenmiller](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/A_S_Cohenmiller)

concept of WELLBEING



Our First Call: Skype and audio only

**JAN 12, 2017**

**ONE YEAR AGO ... TODAY...on this  
very campus**

# First Submission-2 days later

**From:** [DO\\_NOT\\_REPLY@allacademic.com](mailto:DO_NOT_REPLY@allacademic.com)  
**Subject:** **International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry Submission Confirmation**  
**Date:** January 15, 2017 at 00:19:58 EST  
**To:** [anna\\_cohenmiller@nu.edu.kz](mailto:anna_cohenmiller@nu.edu.kz)  
**Reply-To:** [DO\\_NOT\\_REPLY@allacademic.com](mailto:DO_NOT_REPLY@allacademic.com)

Dear Anna CohenMilelr,

Thank you for submitting to the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry. Your submission, "The Ambivalence of Being Neither Fully at Work nor Fully at Home: Arts-Based Participatory Action Research with Motherscholars to Enhance Wellbeing," will be reviewed, and you should expect to hear from us within 2-4 weeks from the deadline for submissions.

For inquiries, please email the address below:

[sub.icqi@gmail.com](mailto:sub.icqi@gmail.com)



**Denise Demers** <denised@uca.edu>

to Anna ▾

1/15/17



Awesome!!!! Thanks - can't wait to begin

# And we're off....ACCEPTED!!!

QI2017 Acceptance

Scholarship/Anna CohenMiller - MOTHERSCHOLARS x



DO\_NOT\_REPLY@allacademic.com

1/26/17 ☆



to anna.cohenmill., me ▾

Dear Anna CohenMilelr,

I am pleased to inform you that we have accepted your proposal

The Ambivalence of Being Neither Fully at Work nor Fully at Home: Arts-Based Participatory Action Research with Motherscholars to Enhance Wellbeing

to present 17-20 May 2017 at the Thirteenth International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry in Champaign-Urbana, IL. We request that you be available to present during any day of the Congress.

Please register for the Congress at: <http://icqi.org/registration/>

This is an official letter of acceptance, but you also have another acceptance letter and a visa letter which you can downloaded at any time from the main menu in your All Academic account. A preliminary program will be posted in the next few weeks.

Sincerely,

# Communication Developments: From emailing, phone, and Skype to Google Docs



**Denise Demers** <denised@uca.edu>

to Anna ▾

1/26/17 ☆



YAYYYYYYYYY!!!! Let's get to work!!!

Let me know when we can chat...

Denise



**Anna CohenMiller** <anna.cohenmiller@nu.edu.kz>

to me ▾

1/26/17 ☆



Whooooo hoo!!! Look at us!!

I've started a google doc that I just shared with, not much on it right now, but it can be a place to put our ideas. If there's something we want the other to see, I've learned that we have to create a "comment" with "@" and the person's name and it will send an email. (But you may have already known this!)

Considering the time difference, are you available in the evenings at all? Perhaps Monday, January 30 or Tuesday January 31 at 8:30pm CST?

All my best and yay!

Anna

# Our Collaboration: Quick overview of the motherscholar wellbeing study

|Let's Color!

**Hello All!** This will be our common space for posting to interact with one another over the next few weeks. We will be have coloring pages that you can access (or you can use your own!) and you can take pictures of your coloring you completed for the day and then write a few comments.

[Here is the link](#) for the **informed consent** approved by the University of Central Arkansas. Currently Denise Demers is the primary PI and later, Anna CohenMiller from Nazarbayev University will join as PI upon official review from the University. By entering your name below, you acknowledge your participation in the study and electronically sign.

# Arts-based Participatory Research: With one another and with our participants



*coloring page that I had already started with. This meant that I went through some ups and downs during this coloring time. In some parts it was great and relaxing and very zen. Then it was very stressful and frustrating. Then it was incredible to have the time with my daughter coloring at the same time. Then it went back to being a bit frustrating and stressful as I wanted more time to color and my son (five) showed up wanting to color too, and my daughter took the full set of colors. This has meant that I'm now planning to color at the office tomorrow, out of the sight of little hands (or not expect to work in peace and quiet!)*

- Example data collection
- Coloring pages
- Reflection
- Shared between all participants



# Qualitative Methodology: Where does friendship fit?

Typical methods of data collection:

- Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Observation
- Case Study
- Ethnography
- History
- Content Analysis
- Friendship?



# Friendship as Method

As cited by Tillmann-Healy ( 2003)

“Someone to talk to, to depend on and rely on for help, support, and caring, and to have fun and enjoy doing things with” (Rawlins, 1992, p. 271)



# How Our Friendship Grew

Tillmann-Healy talks about spending TIME .... That is how she built friendships and thus used it as a methodology.

Our extended time has been continuous and naturally emerged.

Methods of Communication included:

- Skype
- Phone Calls
- Text
- Google doc messages
- Emails



This was *not* work but a development of a friendship that included working together



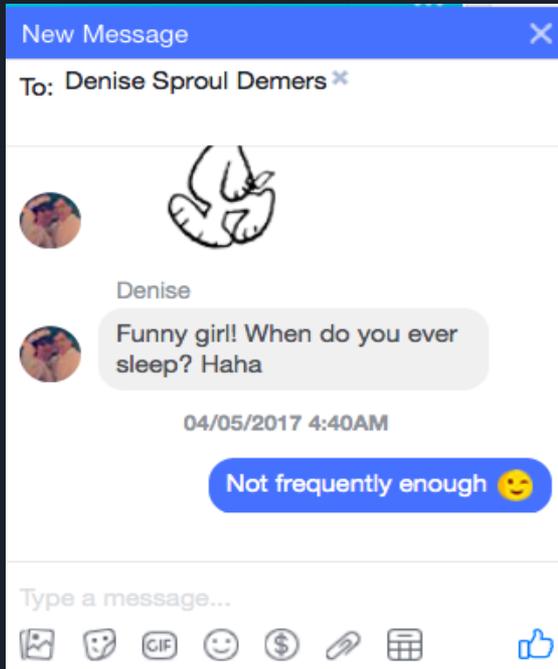
## What Makes Friendship Our Methodology?

- Interpersonal bond characterized by ongoing communicative management
- Provided emotional AND Identity resources (e.g., Our wellbeing study with motherscholars)
- Creativity with connection to McKay et al
- Quality of emotional, intimate, companionship type support Demir et al, 2017



*Our friendship grew and strengthened and began to influence our research, our findings, and enhanced the study*

# Signs of Developing Friendship: Ease of communication

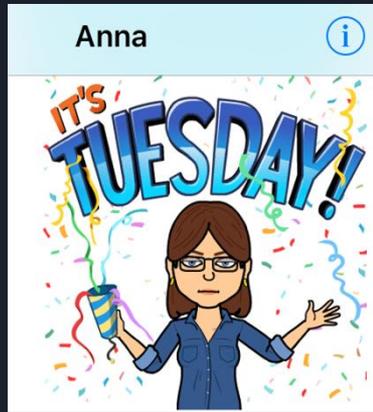


- **Humor and support**
- **Honesty and vulnerability**
- **Ex. Sharing emoji's and gifs, asking about each other's lives, sharing details**

# From Serious Talks to Laughing and Sharing



# Offering Support and Humor: Texting Bitmoji's



Whoa that's fancy!! How do you do it?

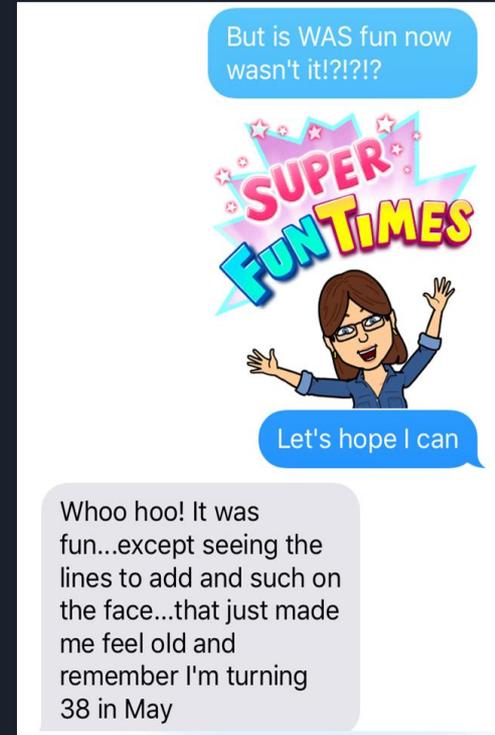
Very creative too 🍌



Get the Bitmoji app and create an avatar



Sooo that took a while but finally figured out the bitmoji!!



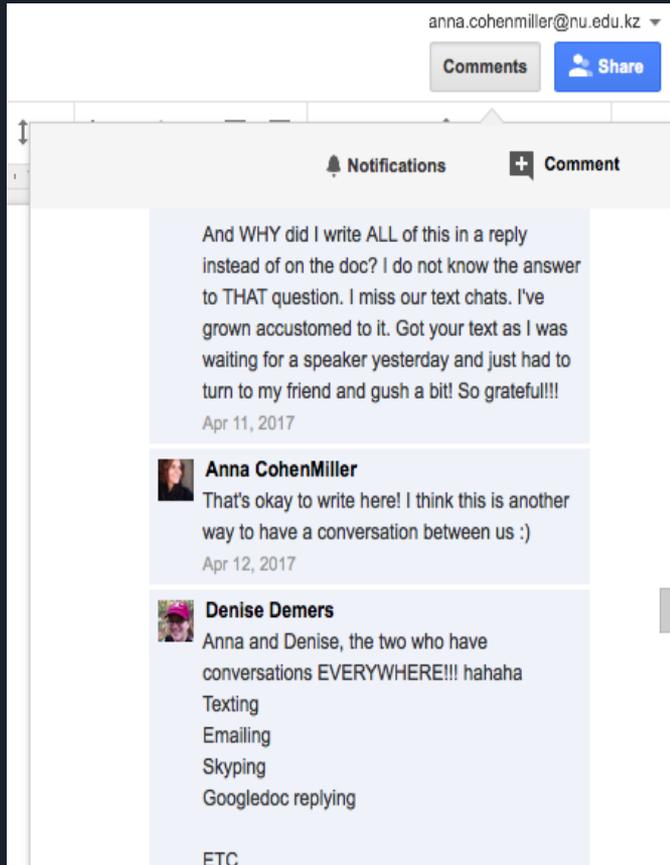
But is WAS fun now wasn't it?!?!?!

Let's hope I can

Whoohoo! It was fun...except seeing the lines to add and such on the face...that just made me feel old and remember I'm turning 38 in May

# An Emerging Friendship Affected our Research

Through multiple conversations, multiple platforms, our friendship developed and we were more able to think deeply about our topic, reflecting individually and together.



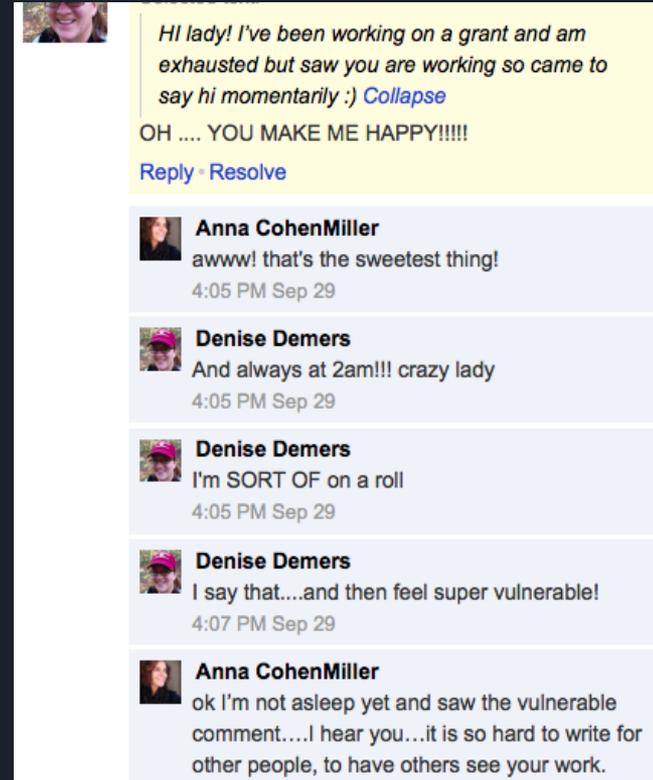


## Time and Friendship

- As Tillmann-Healy (2003, 2006) mentions, time is the most important factor for friendship as methodology.
- Our friendship development directed our work including
  - consistent interactions (e.g., texting almost daily)
  - maintaining contact throughout the entire year
  - relationship of openness
  - authentic interactions

# Hearing / Seeing Our Voices

- Similar to a face-to-face friendship, the voice of the other person came through in our online interactions
- Facilitating our research, included our ability to talk and consider things from another angle and be open and vulnerable in the process



A screenshot of a Facebook conversation thread. The thread starts with a yellow highlighted message from an unnamed user: "Hi lady! I've been working on a grant and am exhausted but saw you are working so came to say hi momentarily :) [Collapse](#)". Below this is the text "OH .... YOU MAKE ME HAPPY!!!!!" and a "Reply · Resolve" link. The thread then shows a series of replies: Anna CohenMiller says "awww! that's the sweetest thing!" at 4:05 PM Sep 29; Denise Demers replies "And always at 2am!!! crazy lady" at 4:05 PM Sep 29; Denise Demers says "I'm SORT OF on a roll" at 4:05 PM Sep 29; Denise Demers says "I say that....and then feel super vulnerable!" at 4:07 PM Sep 29; and finally, Anna CohenMiller replies "ok I'm not asleep yet and saw the vulnerable comment....I hear you...it is so hard to write for other people, to have others see your work."

*Hi lady! I've been working on a grant and am exhausted but saw you are working so came to say hi momentarily :) [Collapse](#)*

OH .... YOU MAKE ME HAPPY!!!!!

[Reply · Resolve](#)

**Anna CohenMiller**  
awww! that's the sweetest thing!  
4:05 PM Sep 29

**Denise Demers**  
And always at 2am!!! crazy lady  
4:05 PM Sep 29

**Denise Demers**  
I'm SORT OF on a roll  
4:05 PM Sep 29

**Denise Demers**  
I say that....and then feel super vulnerable!  
4:07 PM Sep 29

**Anna CohenMiller**  
ok I'm not asleep yet and saw the vulnerable comment....I hear you...it is so hard to write for other people, to have others see your work.

# Clarifying Our Thoughts / Analysis with Someone We Trust, a Friend

The screenshot shows a text message conversation. At the top, Denise Demers (2:27 PM Sep 29) has selected the text: *We saw the community as that of*. She says, "Not sure I understand this sentence" and provides a "Reply" and "Resolve" link. Below this, Anna CohenMiller (4:10 PM Sep 29) responds with a partially visible message: "oh that is a ve... was trying to... even though v... matter that w... face, instead... San Antonio, 'motherschola... motherschola". Denise Demers (7:59 PM Sep 28) then responds with a selected text: *Thus, using the role accumulation theory allows*. She says, "ugh...I just had to get that out. Sounds HORRIBLE, but the gist is down" and provides a "Reply" and "Resolve" link. Finally, Anna CohenMiller (4:11 PM Sep 29) responds: "no, it really is great just to get words down! we can work through the fine tuning later, but first we have to get our ideas and clarify our thoughts to another audience".

**Denise Demers** 2:27 PM Sep 29 -  
Selected text:  
*We saw the community as that of*  
Not sure I understand this sentence  
[Reply](#) - [Resolve](#)

**Anna CohenMiller**  
oh that is a ve...  
was trying to...  
even though v...  
matter that w...  
face, instead...  
San Antonio,  
"motherschola...  
motherschola...  
4:10 PM Sep 29

**Denise Demers** 7:59 PM Sep 28 -  
Selected text:  
*Thus, using the role accumulation theory allows*  
ugh...I just had to get that out. Sounds HORRIBLE,  
but the gist is down  
[Reply](#) - [Resolve](#)

**Anna CohenMiller**  
no, it really is great just to get words down! we  
can work through the fine tuning later, but first  
we have to get our ideas and clarify our  
thoughts to another audience  
4:11 PM Sep 29

- The greatest results in the study came from discussion and constant comparison between us in developing an agreed upon understanding of the data.



## Friendship within Analysis

- Our analysis was at times informal:
  - checking in with one another first thing in the morning and before going to bed
  - When one of us would text in the evening, it was just the start of a new day for the other living on the other side of the globe.
- The time zone difference, seemingly a hindrance, helped keep each other accountable.
  - When one person was asleep, the other was working and would leave notes and/or a text to wake up to, thus giving direction **and support** for the analysis



## Findings – Friendship Improves Methodology

*“Someone to talk to, to depend on and rely on for help, support, and caring, and to have fun and enjoy doing things with” (Rawlins, 1992, p. 271)*

- Utility of technology - finding one another online, video, texting, emailing, calling,
- Communication
- Openness
- Vulnerability
- Sharing
- Ongoing communicative management helped to develop a bond
- Provided emotional **and** identity resources



Thank you!

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