Katie Linder: You're listening to Research In Action, episode 179.

Katie Linder: Welcome to Research In Action, a weekly podcast about topics and issues related to research in higher education, featuring experts across a range of disciplines.

Katie Linder: I'm your host, Dr. Katie Linder, research director at Oregon State University e-campus, a national leader in online education.

Katie Linder: Along with every episode we post show notes with links to resources mentioned in the episode, a full transcript and an instructor guide for incorporating the episode into your courses. Visit our website at ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast to find all of these resources.

Katie Linder: On this episode. I'm joined by Dr. Natalie Pope, the Otis endowed professor in gerontology and intergenerational social work and Director of Doctoral Programs, in the College of Social Work at the University of Kentucky.

Katie Linder: In 2010, Dr. Pope received her PhD in social work at the University of Georgia, with a concentration on qualitative research methods. Dr. Pope's program of research broadly focuses on older adults and their family caregivers.

Katie Linder: Specifically her scholarship aims to address planning for future caregiving needs, behavioral health of community dwelling older adults and family care giving across the lifespan.

Katie Linder: Her teaching in the college centers on clinical social work practice and Dr. Pope teaches courses on clinical social work practice, human behavior theory and qualitative research methods.

Katie Linder: Natalie, thank you so much for joining me on the show today.

Natalie Pope: You're welcome. Thank you. I'm glad to be here.

Katie Linder: I'm really excited to dive into some of your research. I know we're going to explore a couple of your projects on today's show and the first one we wanted to dive into was a project that you're developing right now on young caregivers.

Katie Linder: Can you share a little bit about your research in this area and especially kind of define what is a young caregiver? And why focus on this particular population?

Natalie Pope: Okay, so I am a social worker and that's my disciplinary background. And when I did my dissertation, I was interested in older women who are caregivers and I really got interested in it because my mom was a caregiver for her dad and her husband, my dad.

Natalie Pope: And so I had had some previous experience with older caregivers, women in their 60s and 70s, but then as a college instructor, I worked at Ohio University for a couple of years and I had students in my class who talked about taking care of a parent, or a grandparent, and being the primary person to do that.

Natalie Pope: And I felt like I had this big, it just sort of rocked my world, because I had thought of caregivers, this is like the unpaid help that you give to an older person who has disability or a loss in functioning. And I had pretty much thought of caregivers as a spousal caregiver or an older person caring for their much older parent. But I had these students who were in their 20s and, primarily in their 20s, but having the sole responsibility for a loved one. And so that's sort of how I came to be interested in it.

Natalie Pope: And when I went to the literature, people define young adulthood sort of differently, but generally, it's this 18 to 40. Sometimes it's 18 to 35, but that's sort of this young adulthood phase. And also when I went to sort of see how many there were of these young adult caregivers, about a quarter of caregivers, according to national data, about 25% of caregivers are between the ages of 18 and 34.

Natalie Pope: So I was like, "Oh, this is a significant group and we don't know a lot about them." They're generally caring for people two generations older than them. Often caregiving for a grandparent. And then when I thought about it, I thought about people having children later in life.

Natalie Pope: And so, you're maybe older when your kids are in high school or grade school and so then you're older and they're in their 20s, so that sort of made sense to me. And then I know there's this phenomenon of grandparent caregivers.

Natalie Pope: And so I wondered about that reciprocal care between people who maybe were raised by their grandparents. And that's sort of how I came to be interested in it. And there's just not a lot we know about this group. I just thought it would be a fun next step study to do.

Katie Linder: That is so fascinating. This research not only sounds so fascinating, it seems like you could go in a number of directions with this. What are some of the research questions that you've decided to focus on, when you're looking at this young caregivers group?

Natalie Pope: Well, I actually ended up partnering with somebody in Oregon and so we did this together and the questions were sort of just basic, how did they become a caregiver? What was that process like for them? And some of that is their decision making about it, their motivation to do it.

Natalie Pope: And then we also were curious about how caregiving affected developmental tasks that you think of in your 20s and 30s. Establishing your career, maybe finishing out school, finding a romantic partner. And so we asked about those things in our interview.

Katie Linder: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Was this primarily an interview based study?

Natalie Pope: It was. That's all of that I've done. I'm qualitative. I've done a lot of qualitative research and they're all interview studies, for the most part. And so these were also telephone interviews, which I'd never done before.

Natalie Pope: And we did telephone interviews for a couple reasons. One is the person I worked with is in Oregon. And so we were trying to figure out a way that we could both have access to people to talk to. And we wanted to also sort of recruit in a wide range across the US, so we were able to talk to people in different states.

Natalie Pope: And telephone interviews make it a little bit more feasible to meet up with people, particularly people who are juggling lots of different things. Telephone interviews is what we did and that was different for me. I had never done those before.

Katie Linder: Okay. A couple of followup questions. I'm really curious how you engaged in recruitment for this particular study? How did you go ahead and find the people who were involved?

Natalie Pope: We used a couple of different strategies. We advertised through Twitter and Facebook and we sent out some messages on college listservs. I just had friends and used sort of personal connections to find college students who might be in a caregiving role.

Natalie Pope: We contacted some of the local family caregiver support group programs and they recruited. They helped recruit for us. And then we did a bit of snowball sampling. We talked to people who knew other people. We ended up talking to 22 people total.

Katie Linder: Okay. I'm really curious, especially in collaborative research projects like the one you're describing, how did you go about developing your interview protocol? Tying that into your research questions and really deciding what you wanted to focus on, especially with telephone interviews where you don't necessarily want these to go on for hours. They're probably relatively short. How did you go about developing your protocol?

Natalie Pope: Paula Baldwin is the person I worked with. She's in Oregon and she's a communications person. That's her background and so it was good, I think, to have a different disciplinary perspective. She had done caregiving research before, so she was familiar with this sort of problem and communications and family and that sort of thing.

Natalie Pope: We just really worked together and drafted a bunch of different versions of the interview guide together. I always like to start with my research questions and I organize my interview guide that way. I often will put the research questions on the interview guide and then under each research question put the interview questions that I think relate to that and that are going to help me answer that particular research question.

Katie Linder: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Natalie Pope: And we also communicated a lot, as we did the interviews, and so there were for sure some adjustments made, in a general sort of way, to questions and prompts that came up in the first couple of interviews that we wanted to add into the interview guide as we did more.

Katie Linder: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Natalie Pope: Yeah, I had honestly never done a study with anyone else. It was really good, but it was a new thing for me.

Katie Linder: Okay. Well, that begs the question. What did you learn from that experience of working with a collaborator, especially since this was the first time, and I know now you do other collaborative work. Do you remember some of the takeaways that you had?

Natalie Pope: Yeah, I think there were some practical challenges. How do we both look at the same data and work on it together? How are we going to manage that and organize it, in the sense of, are we going to use word and are we going to use the comments function? Is that going to get too messy?

Natalie Pope: And I wanted to use a software, but she didn't have access to it. And it wasn't a a web based software, so we couldn't share it together because she was at a different institution.

Natalie Pope: Just figuring out how we're going to manage it. I think what we ended up doing was doing the analysis together for the first, I don't know, 25% of the interviews or something. We would independently code the interviews, open code it and then talk.

Natalie Pope: We did a lot of phone conferencing and then we would, we did this, we would do separate interview analysis and then we'd come together and talk about it and think about what codes we wanted to put in the code book and how we were going to define them and what a code exemplar looks like. And I had never done this.

Natalie Pope: I see sort of the ideal code book like it has a code, has a definition, it has an exemplar and I see the benefit of doing that, but when you're working by yourself, sometimes you don't necessarily need that, because you know what you mean when you say burden or whatever.

Natalie Pope: But working with somebody else, we really had to define it, so that we both were on the same page and it was good. It forced me, I think, to think about things more thoroughly maybe? I don't know. It helps me sort of to articulate what I meant earlier on, I think.

Natalie Pope: But I think it was good. I think some of the challenges are just, I ended up being able to recruit a lot more caregivers than she did and so I did the bulk of the interviews and so just practically, if I'm the person who does the prescreening interview with somebody, do I then pass it off to my colleague who has done fewer interviews?

Natalie Pope: Just how to sort of manage the workload, I think, is also something you learn and you sort of navigate through. But I think it's good to do it with someone else. I think it helps to have another set of eyes on the data. And I don't remember specific, although don't remember specific examples. I know that she saw things that I didn't see, but it is, the challenges are just working with someone else's ... both of us sort of having different timelines and we work at different institutions, so she teaches more than I do.

Natalie Pope: And I think they're on quarters and I'm on semesters, so her busy time wasn't my busy time and just those sort of practical things and managing all that was a challenge. But it wasn't impossible. But it was my first time doing that with someone else. That was different for me.

Katie Linder: I'm curious if you can also talk about the collaborative process, as it pertains to writing up the results. Because as you were talking about the code book in particular, I'm currently working on a team based coding project, as well, so I can absolutely understand this.

Katie Linder: One of the benefits, I think, is that you have this documentation, that in some ways makes it easier to write up your results because you have these clear code books that you can say, "This is exactly what we used. And this is the process involved."

Katie Linder: And in some ways that kind of early thought process helps, I think, on the the latter parts of writing up the results. Can you talk a little bit about that? Was that something you also found or were there particular challenges when it came to actually figuring out what you were going to have as outputs from this particular project?

Natalie Pope: Yeah. What we ended up doing is we did the analysis together at the beginning and then at some point, maybe after half of the interviews were coded and we had a really solid code book, I took over, because it was a little bit more, I had a little bit more time to do it and I don't know.

Natalie Pope: For me, I just wasn't quite sure how we would do it together the whole time along. I felt like at some point somebody has to sort of take the lead and and finish it out. I know that's not true, but for me at the time, I felt like let me just finish up. Not in, I mean, she coded all interviews, but in terms of translating codes to themes and doing the memoing about what the themes are and what it looks like, sort of that depth that goes beyond description, but goes to more analysis. I definitely took the lead.

Natalie Pope: But when we would talk on our conference calls, I'm a huge fan of an audit trail. And so I type everything out. And so I have a word document that's pages and pages long, from every time we talked. And I am able to keep track of every decision we make. And when she says something really profound about the data, I'm writing it down and that will make it into the paper.

Natalie Pope: And so I think writing things down as we do it helped me to sort of move my thinking forward beyond just describing the data through the codes to "What does this mean? And "What does this say sort of big picture and more thematically."

Natalie Pope: So I think for me, I took the lead at the end, to help finish it up and the audit trail and us sort of talking together and vocally sort of talking through the data and me taking notes on all of that helped.

Natalie Pope: And then once I had drafts of papers, I sent them to her and we probably conferenced again and talked through it. If it didn't sort of resonate with what she felt like she was saying, sometimes I would have a struggle to sort of name a theme and she helped me with that and helped me sort of play with words that spoke to what we were saying.

Katie Linder: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay. So I think we've held off our listeners long enough who are like, "Well, what is the results of this? What are some of the things that you're finding? What was interesting? What did you learn?"

Katie Linder: Can you tell us a little bit about what came out of this study? And it sounds like you had multiple papers that came out of it, but are there a few key findings that you can share with us?

Natalie Pope: Yeah, I'm still working through getting all of the papers out, but we had submitted a paper this summer that focused on how people, how the participants, how they adjusted to assuming the caregiving role.

Natalie Pope: And so we found sort of three big themes and one of them is embraced. They embraced the caregiving role. And these participants sort of leaned into caregiving and they embraced caregiving. They found their new normal where they prioritized the need of their relative.

Natalie Pope: And it was sort of a drastic disruption in their life for many of them. But they just went with it and they did it. And then a second group of people maybe did that for a short time, but then they made compromises. They found ways to readjust and keep their own identity where they also were meeting their loved one's needs too.

Natalie Pope: One young woman, she was caring for her aunt who had bipolar disorder and depression. And at first she said, "I had my friends stop coming over because my aunt felt uneasy when people that she didn't know were in the house. And so I stopped all my friends from coming over." And then she said, "But eventually I realized, this is my house, too and I'm going to have people over and she's going to have to learn how to manage that."

Natalie Pope: And that's this idea of compromising, adjusting to have a more balanced view of meeting the needs of my relative, but still meeting my own needs. And then this third group, a third finding, is people who sort of really naturally integrated caregiving into their existing roles. And so while some of the participants said, "My life was put on hold with caregiving. Nothing else happened. I didn't have any more kids. Dating stopped happening when my grandmother was living with me."

Natalie Pope: These people were like, "Yeah, I bring my mom with me when I go out with friends." And they have just an easier time incorporating their relative into their daily routine. And for some of these sort of integration people, that we called them, oftentimes their caregiver, their care recipient, their needs were not as intense. They were maybe caring for a grandmother who had arthritis or rheumatoid arthritis or something, versus a mother who had Alzheimer's or something like that, or dementia.

Natalie Pope: So that's just how people responded to caregiving is sort of one paper that we've worked on. And we have another paper that we're working on now related to just how caregiving effects these sort of big buckets of people's lives, employment and school, romantic relationships, and future plans, that sort of thing, so we have another paper we're working on.

Katie Linder: Okay. Well, this is so interesting. We're going to take a brief break. When we come back, we'll hear a little bit more from Natalie about some of her research on foster parent mentoring. Back in a moment.

Katie Linder: The Research In Action podcast discusses research in higher education that has a direct and immediate impact on faculty, staff and students across the world, including topics that directly benefit students success.

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Katie Linder: Natalie, I know one of the other really interesting projects you're working on is focused on foster parent mentoring. Can you share a little bit about this project and how it came to be?

Natalie Pope: Sure. I'm in the college of social work at UK and we have, as part of our college, a training resource center and they get lots of state grants to work with foster and adoptive families. And so we had a meeting a couple of years ago where we talked about how they're doing all this really great work and we wanted to integrate what they were doing into the research goals of the college.

Natalie Pope: And so they work with a program, a foster parent mentor program. They actually run a program. It's a statewide program for foster families in Kentucky. And it's where new foster parents are paired with a seasoned foster parent as a mentor. And they have this mentoring relationship for six months and they really don't know, what we know.

Natalie Pope: And the research is that there are mentoring programs for birth parents, there are mentoring programs for kids in foster care and we know that they have a lot of good outcomes. We don't know a lot about mentoring for foster parents and we know relatively nothing about this relationship. What does mentoring look like between a foster parent, between a new foster parent and a seasoned foster parent.

Natalie Pope: And then on the other, a related thing was, you know I love qualitative research. I do interview-only studies pretty much. And I do what I do really well and I know what I know pretty well. And so I was wanting to sort of stretch myself and try something different.

Natalie Pope: And I had been reading about dyadic analysis, which is where you interview pairs in a relationship. And with my interest in caregiving, It made me think about how I can interview maybe a care recipient and the caregiver. But I thought about this mentoring program and if we're interested in that relationship, well, let's interview the mentor and the mentee. And compare what they say about the relationship.

Natalie Pope: I started this project in that way and to be honest, this isn't my area of content expertise at all. Before I started school, before I got my PhD, I did do work in child welfare. And so I have some previous work background, but it's been long, many years ago. But I did start this study knowing that we have this foster parent mentor program in the state that hasn't really been looked at and I wanted to try something new and there you go. You know?

Katie Linder: Okay. And the rest is history.

Natalie Pope: The rest is history.

Katie Linder: So I'm curious about, of course, this dyadic analysis and it sounds like, I mean, much of qualitative research can get kind of complicated and messy, depending on the data you're looking at. There's so many different angles through which you can view it. There's so many different coding strategies, that kind of thing.

Katie Linder: I'm curious what your approach has been to learning about this new methodology and trying it on for size because it sounds like it's one that you were being very experimental with. To see is this a fit for this particular project? Is it a fit for your work? So how did you approach taking on this new thing?

Natalie Pope: Well, I did some reading and you can read about something and then it makes sense and it seems clean. Right? And then you actually do it and you see how it's not clean. I did some reading and I can give you some references that maybe you can put in the show notes that I think are really helpful.

Katie Linder: Yeah, we can definitely do that.

Natalie Pope: The two people who I looked at particularly, they actually are researchers in Israel and I had heard one of them at a conference, at a gerontology conference. And so I read some, and I'm not going to actually say the name because I feel like I'm not going to say it correctly, but I'll give you some references.

Natalie Pope: I did some reading, which informed my decisions, even in interviewing, and some of the research it talks about the benefits and the disadvantages of interviewing people separately, by the same interviewer or interviewing people at the same time, by separate interviewers. Or interviewing people together.

Natalie Pope: There's decisions to be made even in the data collection. If you're interviewing a dyad, how do you want to go about doing that? On my end, I decided I was really doing this study by myself. For me, it was about interview. I wanted to, I decided to interview the mentor and the mentee separately.

Natalie Pope: And I did that for a couple of reasons. I think practically it would have been hard to find a time for the mentor and the mentee to be together and I also wanted them to be able to speak freely about the relationship and about each other. And so I thought talking to them separately would help this.

Natalie Pope: And they've really only been together for six months. This was a time limited relationship and I interviewed them somewhere in the period of the six months. I wasn't sure how that relationship was going to be or the closeness or not. I had decided to interview them separately.

Katie Linder: Natalie, can you talk a little bit about the analysis side of this? Because I can imagine it's challenging. It's looking at this again from a couple different angles and qualitative can just, it's messy. This is what I'm hearing, as you're talking about this, I'm immediately thinking this is going to get really messy, really fast. Tell us more about that.

Natalie Pope: Yeah, I feel like it's messy and I think particularly when you're talking about concepts like relationship, closeness or intimacy or whatever. I mean, you can do a qualitative study where you ask the things that are fairly straightforward and they're not as messy.

Natalie Pope: But when you get to concepts that could be a little bit more abstract, it's just harder. The questions, the purpose was really how perceptions about foster parent mentoring relationships compare within and across mentor/mentee dyads. Again, my questions were like, "How does mentoring happen? What does this look like? What is quality relationship look like for you? And how does this compare to your relationship with your mentor or your mentee?"

Natalie Pope: So generally when I look at, when I'm doing an interview study, I look at each case, which is each participant and I look at them individually and then I look at them over the aggregate, sort of the whole group of people. Whether that's 20 or 18 or whatever. Here, though, I was looking at the individual, but then the two people together, which I interviewed 10 pairs. And it ended up being 22 people because in two situations, a spouse came, but it was 10 pairs, 22 people. It was moving back and forth between the individual and then the pair and then the 22 as a whole.

Natalie Pope: Practically, what I did, I looked through each transcript individually and I tried to memo after each interview and not just a field note, like my description, but also my gut, my sense of how things were in that relationship. I did that after each interview and then I tried to look at each interview transcript as a pair and then write another memo about what I was seeing as I looked at each, the two interview transcripts together.

Natalie Pope: It was sort of just moving back and forth between the individuals and the dyads and then the whole, and I just got lost. Sometimes I just got lost figuring out where I was and also again, this idea of relationship. I struggled with concepts like mutuality and reciprocity and are those different or are those the same and am I overthinking it. Just those sorts of things.

Natalie Pope: I've only submitted one paper from this project so far and I tried to be very clear about how I was adapting dyadic analysis. I try to use that word adapting if I'm not, if I don't feel like I'm doing it in a purist sort of way. And when I presented data, I tried to, as much as possible, present pairs of data, so where the mentor said something and then I have the mentees' comment about that same topic, so that the reader can see how they each feel together.

Natalie Pope: I did a mix of presenting paired data with just individual data to flush out the particular theme.

Katie Linder: To what degree does this analysis allow you to also do kind of subgroup analysis of the mentor and the mentee as an aggregate group? Is that something that, because you mentioned kind of looking at the group as a whole, you mentioned looking at the pairs, you mentioned looking at the individuals.

Katie Linder: My thought would be you could also divide the group, based on the sub groups and try to look across their responses, as well. Is that something that's kind of allowed within this methodology?

Natalie Pope: I think so. I don't know. Honestly, I think so and because I only had 10 pairs and so I ended up having 11 mentees and 11 mentors. Certainly people do an N of 11 is fine. In some studies, it's a little bit small. For me, if I was going to do a paper, if I was going to look at just the mentees, I probably would interview more people, more pairs.

Natalie Pope: But I do think that, but I guess, no, I guess I did do that. This last paper I looked at sort of what challenges the mentors, what challenges the mentees talked about and how the mentor sort of counseled them through that. And that's sort of looking at the all the mentees together and all the mentors together.

Natalie Pope: I think there is the ability to do that. Yeah. At least in my study, that's what I did.

Katie Linder: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Natalie Pope: But then I also, again, tried to look at those pairs and I'm still sorting through the data to do a paper that's really about that relationship, what that looks like. I'm still honestly just struggling through it, but I'll get there.

Katie Linder: So Natalie, you mentioned this concept of getting lost in the data, as you're looking at all these different levels of analysis, and I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about were there strategies? Were there things maybe even you stumbled upon that kind of helped you to get yourself out of that lost place and to kind of get on more stable ground, as you're trying to write this stuff up and actually have something to say about this data? What was your response and kind of your strategy when you found yourself to be a little bit lost?

Natalie Pope: Yeah, I've tried a couple of different strategies and even when I'm doing something I feel very comfortable with, methodologically, I generally can get lost because, like you said, I think qualitative research can be a little bit messy. I'm a big fan of memoing and just writing out what I'm thinking, even if it just pings around in my head, it just feels confusing.

Natalie Pope: And so writing can clarify my thinking. And so this is just like me writing something that no one will ever see, but it helps me to figure out what I'm thinking. And sometimes it can, again, clarify my thinking about a particular thing or reveal to me places that I need to do more thinking or more exploring. And so sometimes, I mean, that always helps me.

Natalie Pope: I think when I got to a place where I felt like I had something, in terms of themes or big ideas, big buckets of where I felt like things, preliminary themes, I went to a whiteboard in my building and wrote everything out and then I called in a colleague, two colleagues probably, to talk it through with them, to get their input. Was I making sense? How did these big buckets sort of fit together? Are there two big buckets that I'm putting separate, but that are really sort of the same thin?

Natalie Pope: I just sort of talked it through. Just a visual sort of map, big bubbles and labels and arrows and lines connecting, that sort of thing. And even in that I would write participants names underneath to see how many people fit or how many pairs fit into this category or that category.

Natalie Pope: Sometimes I do that and I take a picture and then I erase what I wrote and I do it again in a little bit of a different way. And I take a picture, so the graphing can help me and that's when I'm further along. But I'm still not seeing how things fit together, because you read a paper, a qualitative paper and it just sounds, if a well done paper sounds interesting and it evokes emotion and it's just really fun to read. But to get to that place is hard.

Natalie Pope: And I think, in qualitative research, I'm really cautious to present my data in a way where it looks like everybody fit into these three themes or these three categories. Because often that's not true. And I feel like it's not very transparent to sort of make it look like it all is wrapped up in a bow.

Natalie Pope: And so figuring out how to account for the nuance and the difference within these three broad themes or four broad themes, that also take some sort of thinking. Again, the journaling, the writing, concept mapping. Sometimes I just pull out a sheet of paper and a pen and that's helpful.

Natalie Pope: I think probably with this study, I used the whole index card thing or cut out. Sometimes I cut out chunks of transcripts and lay it out on the floor. I mean, I have to sort of move through different mediums. Sometimes the computer screen isn't helpful for me. I'm just feeling stuck and so I need to try another way to engage with the data.

Katie Linder: It sounds very visual and kinesthetic.

Natalie Pope: Yeah, I would say that. Yep.

Katie Linder: Okay. Well, Natalie, this has been so fascinating. Thank you for taking us on the journey to learn a little bit more about your young caregiver's research and about your dyadic analysis. This has been really fun. Thanks for coming on the show.

Natalie Pope: Thank you. I'm glad to be here. Thank you.

Katie Linder: And thanks also to our listeners for joining us for this week's episode of Research In Action. I'm Katie Linder and we'll be back next week with a new episode.

Katie Linder: The Research In Action podcast is a resource funded by Oregon State University e-campus, a national leader in online education that delivers transformative learning experiences to students around the world.

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