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Wi: Journal of Mobile Media, Winter/Spring 2007

The online version of this article can be found at:

<https://doi.org/10.65968/RSLE7991>

Jiwani, Yasmin, "Rules for Collaborative Research". *Wi: Journal of Mobile Media, Winter/Spring* (2007).
Web. <https://doi.org/10.65968/RSLE7991>



Rules for Collaborative Research

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Collaborative research can often be an exciting venture if conducted with honest intentions, respect for the collaborators and accountability to the project. Having experienced both the benefits and disadvantages of collaborative research, here are some of the rules that I have finally come up with!

1. Don't hoard information. In a true collaboration, there should be an open exchange of information. When information is hoarded, its signs are apparent. As for example, telling someone that they have received feedback about the initiative but then not sharing that right away, is like dangling a carrot, creating a situation where one has to ask for it.
2. Watch out for dependency. Dependency is a real marker of an abuse of power. When a collaborative partner creates a certain kind of dependency – i.e., not responding to requests, imposing meeting times that are at the last minute, creating conditions where you constantly have to ask for information or resources, then beware.
3. Collaboration involves the active participation of all partners. When one partner doesn't attend meetings, is consistently unavailable and doesn't communicate with all the partners, this signifies that they do not regard the project as having a high priority. Their silence is as communicative as their participation.

4. Power over – in a true collaboration it is understood that all partners are above all accountable to the project and to each other. When one partner attempts to assume a power position by controlling funds, not responding on time, withholding information, and failing to complete what they had said they were going to do within a given time-line, then this becomes a sign of a failing collaboration.

5. Respect is an integral part of a true collaboration. In such a collaboration, each partner tries to put herself in the position of the other partners – to empathize as much as possible. So if one partner has a child at home, the other partners should naturally factor this into account. But the onus is on all partners to do that. Responsibility is the other half of empathy – while one may have empathy, one has to demonstrate responsibility and hence accountability. If other collaborators are taking time off to work on a project, then the collaborator who has other familial obligations should take care of this in order that the team maximizes its time together. Naturally, this is not always possible but respecting others' time is just as important. This is also where things like the per diem costs become important. If one partner lives in the area, and the others are flying in, then it is incumbent that resources be set aside to accommodate those that are flying in. Research = time, and the time one invests should be recognized for what it is. Make sure that the other partners have their needs covered. They are not being paid for the work.

Biography

Yasmin Jiwani is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at Concordia University, Montreal. Her doctorate in Communication Studies from Simon Fraser University examined issues of 'race' and representation in Canadian television

news. Prior to her move to Montreal, she was the Executive Coordinator of the BC/Yukon FREDA Centre for Research on Violence against Women and Children. Her recent publications include: *Discourses of Denial: Mediations of Race, Gender and Violence*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006; and an edited collection with Candice Steenbergen and Claudia Mitchell titled: *Girlhood, Redefining the Limits*. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2006. Her work has appeared in *Social Text*, *Violence Against Women*, *Canadian Journal of Communication*, *Journal of Popular Film & Television*, and in the *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics*.