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A Collaborative Approach to Research and Inquiry

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Collaborative therapy (Anderson, 1997; Anderson & Goolishian, 1992) is a therapeutic approach grounded in a postmodern-social constructionist perspective of knowledge. In this perspective, postmodernism's skeptical stance toward universal knowledge and dominant discourses and its preference for local knowledge and social constructionism's view of knowledge as co-created in relationship and dialogue go hand-in-hand. This approach to knowledge informs a dynamic way to conceptualize and conduct research, offering a counterbalance to academia's pervasive preference for research grounded in logical-positivism (i.e., scientific method). This chapter details how we draw from the philosophical stance and dialogical approach described in collaborative therapy to think about, design and conduct a research inquiry. We present the philosophical background of this approach, discuss its characteristics, and give examples for putting it in action.

This is not an approach we developed in joint projects, rather it has evolved through our relationships with each other and those who work with these ideas. Each of us works in different places and contexts, yet our work shares a commitment to collaborative practices that include participants' voices in the process of research inquiry. Diane Gehart has conducted research primarily in "teaching" universities in masters level programs with minimal financial or other support; in this context, smaller, qualitative, community-based research projects in on-campus clinics has been most viable. Her research has focused on the client's lived experience of therapy (Gehart & Lucas, in press; Gehart & Lyle, 1999, 2001), which is scarcely represented in professional literature, as well as

qualitative research more broadly (Gehart, Lyle, & Ratliff, 2001). Margarita Tarragona is in a very similar situation at the universities she teaches in Mexico City. She and her colleagues conduct their interview studies of clients' and therapists' experiences of therapy and fund their own research at Grupo Campos Elíseos, a small private training center. Saliha Bava has research experiences in various community and academic settings, currently working primarily in the academic setting with Masters level students and masters and doctoral level students at the Houston Galveston Institute, where there is also minimal funding for research.

We would like to add that many of our colleagues who work from a collaborative perspective in therapy conduct research using many of these same ideas. Many describe their collaborative research projects in this volume, including Klaus Deissler; Sue Levin; Glen Garnder and Tony Neugebaur; Debbie Feinsilver, Eileen Murphy, and Harlene Anderson; Sylvia London and Irma Rodriguez; Marsha McDonough and Patricia Koch; Kauko Haarakangas, Birgitta Alakare, Jukka Aaltonen, and Jaako Sekkula.

Philosophical Background

The collaborative research or inquiry approach we describe is a continuation and evolution of the turn of the century debates about the differences between natural and human sciences and the respective goals of explanation (*Erklären)* versus understanding (*Verstehen;* Schwandt, 2000). Proponents of the Neo-Kantian *Verstehen* tradition argue that the goal of social sciences is foremost to understand human behavior rather than predict it. This pursuit for understanding human behavior has been at the heart of social science endeavors for over a century and has been the driving force behind most forms of qualitative research.

Phenomenology and interpretivism were two of the earliest methods used by social scientists to understand human behavior, with the former focusing on the understanding of an individual's subjective reality and the latter on the meaning of human action (Schwandt, 2000). The aim for these researchers was to "understand the subjective meaning of action (grasping the actor's beliefs, desires, and so on) yet do so in an objective manner…Both the phenomenological observer and linguistic analyst [studies human behavior using detailed transcripts of verbal and non-verbal communication] generally claim this role of the uninvolved observer" (p. 192-194). In these approaches, the researcher brackets or suspends biases as much as possible to allow for accurate rendering of the subject's experience and lived reality.

The possibility of a bracketed or an uninvolved researcher was questioned in the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer (1960/1994), inspired by the work of Heidegger. In philosophical hermeneutics, understanding is considered an act of interpretation; it is produced in dialogue rather than discovered or reproduced. Departing from phenomenological and interprevist traditions, socio-cultural prejudices are not regarded as something the interpreter can separate from in order to gain a "clearer" understanding. "The point is not to free ourselves of all prejudice, but to examine our historically inherited and unreflectively held prejudices and alter those that disable our efforts to understand others, and ourselves" (Garrison, 1996, p. 434, cited in Schwandt, 2000, p. 195). Only through dialogical encounters with what is different from ourselves can we identify, test, and redefine our prejudices. Thus, understanding is a lived and embodied experience that simultaneously shapes one's sense of personhood and one's experience of

life itself. From this hermeneutic perspective, the researcher is no longer in a detached observer but rather a dynamic participant who shapes and is shaped by the process.

Social constructionists share much in common with philosophical hermeneutics but depart on the issue of truth, which the latter asserts is arrived at through interpretative practice. In contrast, social constructionists are more skeptical. A moderate or "weak" (Schwandt, 2000) form of social constructionism, developed in the feminist philosophy of science, is attentive to the subtle ways that the researcher's sociocultural biases inform the research process. This model embraces objectivity and attempts to reduce bias by identifying and critiquing the researcher's background assumptions in order to arrive at communally shared standards of evaluation. In contrast, a "strong social" (Schwarndt, 2000) constructionist approach (Gergen, 1999) maintains that even observational descriptions cannot escape sociocultural bias because they are conveyed through language, which is always embedded in broader culturally defined language games (Wittgenstein, 1978). This strong social constructionist approach maintains that there is no single framework that can be identified as "better" outside of its communal or cultural context. Such a view gives rise to *relational hermeneutics* (Anderson, 2005), which emphasizes the interpretive stance that occurs socially in language. Thus, a research methodology grounded in a strong social constructionist perspective takes into account the immediate relational and broader social contexts that shaped the knowledge which emerges from the research endeavor. Collaborative Therapy draws heavily from this social constructionist perspective or relational hermeneutics, thus creating a theoretically harmonious research option for therapists working in this tradition.

Overview of Collaborative Therapy

Collaborative Therapy, also known as Collaborative Language Systems Therapy, is a postmodern, social constructionist approach to therapy developed by Harlene Anderson and Harold Goolishian (Anderson, 1997, 2001; Anderson & Goolishian, 1988, 1992). As its name suggests, language and collaboration are central in this way of conceptualizing and doing therapy. Language is viewed as the medium through which people construct and express meaning and lived reality. Collaboration refers to a "stance," a way of relating with clients and with conversational partners in general.

Collaborative Therapy proposes that human systems are "linguistic systems" (Anderson, 1997; Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). People are intertwined in relational networks that are built in and through language and are constantly taking part in multiple conversations. These can be "internal" within ourselves, and "external," with other people. Through these conversations we make sense of our experiences, therefore, language systems are also "meaning generating systems" (Anderson, 1997). From this perspective, language is not just a "tool" that human beings use to describe the world and themselves, rather, language builds or constitutes lived reality.

Anderson (2005) places the Collaborative Therapy view of language in the postmodern tradition of hermeneutics and social constructionism, influenced by the ideas of theorists like Wittgenstein, Vygotsky, Bahktin, Gergen, and Shotter. She also describes CLS as a postmodern approach referring to a broad critique that takes a critical perspective, challenging "fixed meta-narratives, privileged discourses and universal truths" (1997,p. 35-36) and emphasizing the importance of local knowledge. Furthermore, Anderson (n.d.) says that although the "postmodern family" has many

branches, they share the notion that knowledge and language are relational and generative.

Anderson (1997) advocates integrating research into the daily work of therapists by continually reflecting on ideas and actions that emerge in therapeutic conversations, becoming what Schon (1991) calls a "reflective practitioner." Rather than separating therapy, consulting, teaching-learning, and research, Anderson views these as similar dialogical processes that are distinguished mainly by their purpose or intent. Their content and outcome may differ, but the relationship between the participants and the process of collaborative inquiry, exploring together the familiar and constructing the new, is essentially the same.

Anderson (2001) states that the central question of collaborative therapy is: "How can therapists create the kinds of conversations and relationships with others that allow all the participants to access their creativities and develop possibilities where none seemed to exist before?" (p.20). Applying the question to collaborative research, we ask ourselves: How can researchers create the kinds of conversations and relationships with others that allow all the participants to access their knowledge, create knowledge and develop understanding where none or little seemed to exist before?

Assumptions and Characteristics of Collaborative Research and Inquiry

Rather than a single methodology or model, collaborative inquiry represents a way of conceptualizing and approaching the research endeavor. Just as the collaborative stance of the therapist is the heart of the therapeutic approach, the stance of the researcher is the defining feature of collaborative inquiry. For this reason, the term "inquiry" is sometimes preferred to "research" with the former emphasizing that participants join the

researcher in the research process and the latter, more traditionally implying that only the researcher's intentions define the process. However, in many contexts it is advantageous to expand the traditional concept of research to include collaborative approaches to generating knowledge. Therefore, in this chapter we use inquiry and research interchangeably.

Researchers have many options for implementing collaborative ideas in research. Table 1 provides a brief overview of a continuum of differences between collaborative and traditional research methods grounded in the scientific method. Although collaborative research projects can take many forms, the informing assumptions are the same. Following are considerations for designing collaborative research endeavors.

[Insert Table 1 here]

Co-construction of Knowledge or "Data"

Collaborative inquiry focuses on the relationship between researchers and participants and is grounded in the assumption that knowledge about their experience is constructed between them through linguistic processes. This view contrasts with research practices in which, as Paré and Larner (2004) comment, data is seen as something the investigator "gets" from participants; such a view fails to "capture the ways in which the researcher's contribution is integral to the participants' experience" (p. 213). Paré and Larner succinctly state what we believe is the most important concept in collaborative research: "research is not simply an act of finding out, but is also always a creating together process" (p. 213). Bray, Lee, Smith and Yorks (2004) define a collaborative inquiry process as "consisting of repeated episodes of reflection and action through which

a group of peers [researcher and participant] strives to answer a question of importance to them" (p. 6).

Tom Strong (2004), a discursive practitioner-researcher who draws on social constructionist ideas, describes his work as "a 'poetic process' in which 'respondents' are as active in their meaning making efforts" as the researcher is" (p. 214). Strong notes that research questions can be an invitation into a joint meaning making process and that this has ethical and pragmatic implications. He describes a difference between a "forensic quest for facts" and an invitation to get accounts or opinions from people. The former is about "'getting things right' while other forms of conversation welcome subjectivity" (p. 214). Influenced by dialogue theorist Bakhtin, Strong skeptically approaches research conversations, questioning whether they have a "tilt" that gives the researcher greater influence over the process than the respondents, whom he refers to as "our reciprocators," emphasizing the interdependence between researchers and participants.

Generative Process

When research participants are no longer viewed as containers for information but interactive participants, research becomes a generative process. In such inquiry, the interviewer does not simply elicit or get responses that are already formed inside the "subject" but participates in the creation of these responses. Anderson's notion of the "not yet said" (1997) refers to how meanings are articulated in the process of conversation and that most ideas are not stored inside the person, but emerge in the dialogue between people. Harry Goolishian expressed this succinctly when he stated: "I never know what I mean until I say it" (Anderson, 1997, 2005). Strong (2004) encourages researchers to "accept our participation in the yet-to-be spoken" and to ask

themselves, "How does my participation in conversations of inquiry shape what I am told" and "What happens when asking clients to make distinctions in previously unarticulated areas of their lives?" (p. 217). He adds that questions are performative: they can evoke, construct and invite positions and experiences from which generative dialogues can emerge. This is similar to William Madsen's statement (1999) "evaluation is intervention" because even if the interviewer's intent is to gather information, the interview itself generates experiences for the participant; it can evoke memories, trigger emotions and question or strengthen ideas. For example, in Gehart and Lyle (2001) participants were asked to describe their experiences of working with male and female therapists (working with both was part of the selection criteria). The research topic itself inspired new insights and perspectives for many participants because they had never put the comparison into words prior to the research interview.

Conversational Partnership

The assumption of collaborative research as joint action blurs the boundary between the researcher and the participants, who are considered conversational partners (Anderson, 1997) or peers (Bray et al., 2004); the research is being performed in partnership with the participants. Researchers must consider many factors when identifying and inviting participants to become active architects of their lived experiences while attempting to create a level playing field. First, researchers must be sensitive to the organizational politics and/or academic discourses, where much of the research is performed (Bava, 2005), which may affect participants' choices to become involved and how they may interpret the process. For example, in attempting to do a web-based dissertation that would be presented outside the normative parameters of a linear text, I

(SB) had to recruit the graduate school's Dean, the Electronic Thesis and Dissertations (ETD) Committee, Dissertation Archiving team and the Computer Sciences research team, which used my dissertation process to test their ideas for developing an ETD language. Thus, in the traditional sense these people would not be identified as research participants, yet they were very instrumental in orchestrating the organizational politics and in the creation of the academic discourse. All three groups were attempting to expand the parameters of traditional research so as to create space for non-traditional electronic dissertations, thus sanctioning my research as legitimate. Thus all those in dialogue about the project were considered conversational partners in the study.

Additionally, researchers must consider the broader disciplinary and organizational discourses regarding what constitutes "research" and how the research will be perceived by various consumers, including the participants, the professional community, and the broader social community. For example, when considering the perspectives of various constituents, a researcher may choose to interview therapists in addition to clients to solicit descriptions of the process from more than one perspective; alternatively, family members or employers may be included in the study as well to broaden the discussion. Including multiple voices is not to establish greater accuracy but rather to create space for the many realities and voices in a given situation. This approach honors the *polyphony* of voices, which are typically preserved and presented in the final report rather than analyzed or otherwise "smoothed over" by the researcher.

Researchers must also consider the endeavor from the participant's perspective, even on seemingly mundane matters. Some of the issues that they identify include time requirements for participants who, unlike the researcher, are generally not paid, resulting

in expenses such as travel and babysitting. Creating an informal and inviting setting for participants reduces the stereotypical sterile "research" context, thus lowering the hierarchy contextually and making the context more conducive to collaboration (Anderson, 1997). Communication is also a factor: Participants should be kept informed throughout the process and a recursive loop set up such that they continue to shape the research product. Lastly, funding agencies often define the research from a generic set of guidelines, often limiting the participants from informing the research program at a local level. To address this issue, Lister, Mitchell, Sloper and Roberts (2003) suggest setting up "user consultation groups" for the research project, who can continue informing the policy and research production. We believe that doing research from a collaborative stance minimizes the risk of exercising "relational violence" (Willig & Drury, 2004) towards research participants.

Mutual Inquiry: Joint Construction of Research Questions

The contexts and situations in which a collaborative research approach is appropriate are easily identified: when you want to understand how people are experiencing (have experienced) and/or understanding a situation or phenomenon from their first person narrative. This approach is particularly well suited for arenas of new inquiry in any discipline; psychological and social researchers have an on-going need to answers these questions. In these disciplines, most research projects include at least one research question that addresses how people experience the phenomenon being studied.

What is unique about collaborative inquiry is that the researcher and participants inquire *together*. Thus, the participants share in developing research questions and finding ways to explore them. The process is one of *mutual inquiry*, similar to that of

collaborative therapy (Anderson 1997). Participants are invited to share in developing and refining the research questions throughout a study. This is particularly important when the researcher is an "outsider" to the community, group or situation being studied. A collaborative approach always involves participants in defining what questions need to be asked and identifying processes that might be useful in answering those questions. In one instance, I (DG) had a client approach me about what she believed therapists needed to know more about: client advocacy (Gehart & Lucas, in press). In this instance, the idea for the project, along with the primary research question, came from the participant rather than the professional.

Collaborative inquiry is particularly useful for informing action that will impact the participants' lives. Participant informed process for social action leads to research questions that the participants identify as pertinent. Participant informed social action can also lead to research questions that require quantitative data collection.

Curious Stance of the Researcher

As in collaborative therapy, the researcher is a *non-expert*, in the participants' lived experience and therefore takes a *"learner"* position (Anderson, 1997). As a learner, the researcher's intention is to learn from the participants: What should be studied? Which questions are most important? How best do we answer these? How do we make sense of the answers? This learner position, developed originally as a stance for therapy, transfers well to the research arena. Curiosity and "not-knowing," two of the hallmarks of collaborative therapy (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992; Anderson, 1997), provide a refreshingly simple and clear description of researcher positioning, whether one is investigating new or familiar territory. A position of curiosity and not-knowing requires

that the researcher acknowledge the limitations of any position or opinion, professional and personal, knowing that any single view of reality is one of many and has been constructed within the relationships and institutions with(in) which one, historically and currently, interacts. Curiosity fuels the research process: a desire to understand how others are experiencing a particular phenomenon. For example, in psychotherapy, collaborative research often explores how clients are experiencing the therapeutic process, providing a counterbalance to the dominance of therapist and researcher descriptions of therapy in professional literature. This shift in the role of researcher and research participant is often represented by choosing to avoid the use of the traditional research term of "subject," with a preference for terms that denote a more active role, such as participant, interviewee, or co-researcher.

Insider Research

The researcher's relationship to the subject matter, context, and participants is different than in traditional research. A collaborative approach does not strive towards objectivity, recognizing that all linguistic descriptions are inherently biased, revealing the assumptions and worldview of the speaker. Instead, collaborative researchers strive toward negotiating a coordinated understanding. In this approach, the detached position of the researcher, which characterizes the scientific method, is no longer a non-negotiable necessity. Describing collaborative research using reflecting team practice conducted by Tom Andersen and his colleagues in Norway, Anderson (1997) explains:

> They have found that this collaborative and inclusive approach to research has enhanced professional-professional and client-professional relationships. Most significant and with far-reaching implications, this collaborative approach brings

> the practitioners to the forefront of research and challenges the convention of research performed by "outsiders" in the academy. Evaluation and research performed by "insiders" [practitioners] becomes a learning opportunity for practitioners and useful in their future practice. (p. 102)

As examples of this type of inquiry about psychotherapy, at Grupo Campos Elíseos there is currently a project in which a client and a therapist were interviewed by a researcher and the three of them together are analyzing the transcripts of these interviews. In another project, a therapist is writing a piece together with her clients about their experience in family therapy with her.

The researcher's insider perspective can be a resource for understanding the phenomenon being studied. Whether an insider, outsider, or somewhere in between, the researcher's position always affects the development, implementation, and outcome of a study. Therefore, researchers make *public* (Anderson, 1997) their positioning in relation to the participants and phenomenon studied by sharing information that has typically not been included in research reports: this may include the researcher's age, gender, ethnicity, professional background, assumptions, experience with the research population, etc. In research reports this may be identified as locating the researcher or researcher's subjectivity. In this way, both sides of the research relationships are visible to the reader, which, paradoxically, may move closer to providing a clearer description of the research study than conventional research. For instance Bava (2001) in her dissertation interwove stories of herself as a researcher and her research process throughout the nine sections on "research narratives." In a section titled "What am I creating" she states:

As I developed my dissertation web, I was asked the question "so what are you doing?" "What is your thesis?" Each of these questions is embedded with certain epistemological assumptions. But, rather than deconstruct them I have chosen to create a story of what I think I am doing. I view my dissertation as a "cultural ritual performance" (Gergen, 1999) within the doctoral research "language game" (Wittgenstein, 1978) located within the academic community of Virginia Tech and postmodernism.

In my effort, to honor the tradition of the language game and to further the *generative discourses* (Gergen, 1999) of doctoral dissertation, I write and talk in ways "that simultaneously challenge existing traditions of understanding, and offer new possibilities for action" (Gergen, 1999, p. 49). I do so by using hypertext, that is, chunks of text which are linked to each other in a narrative structuring that is at times circular and at other times linear. I assume that you, the reader, bring to this text your context and meaning frames as you participate in the performance. Since I view dissertation as a production of a performance, I invite you to the interactive unfolding stories of my internship experience and the research process (Bava, 2001).

Interview as Conversation: Inquiry as Construction

Qualitative interviews are one of the most frequently used options for accessing participant perspectives because they allow for interviewees to use their own words to describe their experience rather than the researcher's predetermined categories. Consistent with other qualitative interviewing approaches in the *Verstehen* tradition, we do not conceptualize interviews as one person asking questions and another responding.

Instead, we conceptualize interviews as a dynamic and organic dialogical process. Both the designated researcher and the invited researcher jointly participate in a dialogical process. They are in conversation about the topics of inquiry and each can contribute to its focus which is usually informed by the conversation itself as it unfolds.

In qualitative research, researchers have many options for structuring interviews from ones highly structured by the researcher to ones that record participant voices with minimal influence from the researcher (Fontana & Frey, 2000). A researcher can structure interviews in various ways depending on the type of knowledge a research team hopes to generate. For example, the research team may decide to not develop any questions at the beginning other than: what do you think we or identified constituents need to know about the identified topic? In another study, the research team may develop a preliminary set of questions or what Anderson, Feinsilver, and Murphy (this volume) refer to as "starter questions" and ask for participant input on the appropriateness and usefulness of the questions as the study evolves; as well, from the initial contact they invite the participants to lead the inquiry conversation with their voice and their interest.

Research interviews are organized around the same principles that guide therapeutic conversations and they share similar goals: to generate knowledge and understandings that are useful to the participants. However, in marked contrast to therapy, it is typically the professional (i.e., the researcher) who begins the conversation with the greater need. Therefore, it is often less challenging for researchers than therapists to assume a curious and *not-knowing* perspective.

Similar to conversational questions (Anderson, 1997) in the therapeutic process, collaborative research questions emerge from the research dialogue, from inside rather

than outside the conversation. The questions emerge from what is being said as the researcher strives to *maintain coherence* with the participants' descriptions of their experience (Anderson, 1997) rather than try to fit what the participant is saying into the researcher's paradigm. Therefore, questions are based on what the participant is saying rather than a rigid script, common in other forms of research.

The interviewer uses conversational questions to clarify and check if she is understanding what the participant wanted to convey. For example when a client being interviwed about his therapy process said that this therapy is "a therapy for grown ups", the researcher asks "what do you mean when you say a therapy for grown ups?" The client goes on to explain that in this therapy she felt she could make her own decision and the therapists were respectful of these.

Though a set of pre-formulated questions may be used to initially guide the interview, conversational questions are always used to facilitate an understanding of the participant's response. When pre-formulated questions are used, they serve as a guideline or starting point; if the interviewee wants to discuss things in a different way or address the topic from a different angle, the researcher respects this, only returning to the original questions if they are later still relevant. In maintaining coherence, collaborative researchers do to not assume meanings of specific words, phrases, or stories, and frequently check to see if what they have heard is what the participant has intended for them to hear.

A series of interviews conducted at Group Campos Elíseos in Mexico City (London, Ruiz, Gargollo & MC, 1998; Tarragona, 1999, 2003; Cortés, Fernández & Tarragona, this volume) provides an example of one way to conduct a collaborative

interview process. The aim was to capture "clients' voices" and explore what they have to say about their therapeutic experiences. The participants were viewed as experts in their own therapeutic experience, and the interviews were conducted in a collaborative way: the researcher states the general purpose of the conversation (to understand therapy from the perspective of the clients) and from then on follows the participant's lead in a dialogical conversation. For example, one interview began as follows:

> Interviewer: Nice to meet you. We are grateful that you are willing to talk with us….We are very interested in understanding the client's perspective of therapy, your experience, what its been like for you, what has worked for you, what has not worked. I don't have a prepared list of questions; I am interested in knowing about your experience: how would you describe your experience in therapy with [her therapists]?

The client responded that in order to describe her experience with these therapists she had to talk about a previous treatment that she had had elsewhere (in another country) and goes on to describe it in detail. Even though the researcher was interested in learning about the client's current therapy, she listens carefully to what the client wanted to discuss about her previous therapy and how understanding her previous experience is necessary to understand what her more recent therapy had been like for her.

Making Meaning: Data Analysis

Data analysis, the process of making meaning, is a practice of a discourse community that occurs recursively through out the research process rather than just post-data collection. All meaning making is a social activity (Lemke, 1995). The process of meaning making starts when one is deciding to delimit and define the research problem,

when one is gathering and reviewing the "pertinent" literature, when one is gathering data and through out the process of writing. Each interaction in the research process is a decision point in which we make sense of the data we have at hand. Thus, in collaborative research, data analysis cannot be separated from the data gathering process itself. Collaborative inquiry generates new meanings and new understandings (Anderson, 1997). Knowledge is generated at several points in the process.

Analysis in this approach contrasts sharply from the conventional conceptualization of data analysis performed solely by the researcher. Instead, the emphasis is on a co-construction of meaning between the researcher and participants. Understanding begins with the collaborative inquiry process, participants sharing their experiences and generating new understandings through the telling. This parallels the collaborative therapeutic process of shared inquiry, which allows clients to hear themselves differently: "'We talked in here about the same things we talk about at home over and over again. But somehow talking about it in here was different. After we talked about it in here, things changed'" (Anderson, 1997, p. 160). These shifts are often identified in dialogue with statements such as, "I am just now realizing…"; "As we've been talking, it occurred to me…"; or "I've never described this to someone before, and now that I say it…."

New knowledge is also generated in the interview process by researchers being *public* (Anderson, 1997) with their understandings and interpretations as they emerge during the interview. While listening, researchers must "take in" what is being said and compare it against personal pre-understandings (Gadamer, 1960/1994); this is the point where the researcher's influence is inevitable because each person lives in uniquely constructed linguistic and experiential worlds based on prior history and experience. Researchers can

lessen the chance of their pre-understandings overshadowing that of the participants by *maintaining coherence* with the client's story (Anderson, 1997). Researchers maintains coherence by using the participant's words and language, staying in sync with the participant's way of talking (speed, volume, tone, etc.), and frequently inquiring about how pieces of the story make sense together rather than making logical assumptions or interpretations. For example, when clients were describing their experience with male and female therapists in Gehart and Lyle (2001), the interviewer was careful to not "fill in the gaps" with logical assumptions about gender stereotyped behaviors; instead clients to describe in their own words what they meant when they said "female therapists are more caring" or "male therapists made us think more."

Somewhat paradoxically, as the researcher tries to maintain coherence with and understand the participant's story, new understandings are created because the researcher's questions are imbued with the researcher's pre-understandings. The seemingly innocuous process of researcher and interviewee trying to understand each other is where new meanings, understandings, and realities are created. Thus, the researcher is not getting closer to the participant's "true" meaning but rather working with the participant to negotiate new understandings.

An experience and emphasis of our collaborative inquiry is that through the joint inquiry process, new meanings are negotiated and emerge for both the participants and the researcher. In most cases, the researcher chooses to further clarify the emerging descriptions by transcribing the interviews and organizing the themes that emerged across interviews. Ideally, researchers do the transcription themselves, creating maximum familiarity with the text and ultimately allowing for a more thorough and efficient

analysis. Anderson (personal communication, October 24, 2005) not only recommends that researchers transcribe themselves but that they also carefully listen to the tape at least one time without taking notes or transcribing to encourage fully attending to the participant without the distraction of being in the conversation, typing or coding.

Qualitative researchers have the option of using computer programs to assist with analysis by creating virtual version of the traditional cut-and-paste index card method. The researchers' interface inevitably shapes their relation to the text of the interview. Although there is little research to indicate the exact effect, I (DG) have found that the computer version encourages the identification of more subthemes because most programs use a tree structure used to track themes.

If the researcher generates an initial set of written themes, it is important that they then presented to the participants for their comment and clarification to produce a final set of themes or to continue in an on-going reflective process of refining descriptions and understandings. For example, Gehart & Lyle (1999) used a series of three interviews to trace clients and therapists' lived experience of change over the course of therapy. Participants reflected and commented on the emerging themes, each time adding new understandings about how their perspectives evolved since the prior meeting. The process of data gathering and analysis became a single harmonious and organic process.

Several researchers have developed specific forms of collaborative analysis and data presentation. One of the authors, Bava (2001, 2005), presents alternative data analytical methods referred to as aesthetic forms of data presentation (Piercy & Benson, 2005). Emphasizing the process of writing as inquiry (Richardson, 2003) and analysis, Bava (2001, 2005) identifies the following as ways to analyze:

1. Stories as interpretations: All stories about the inquired experience or subject are interpretations, i.e. relational hermeneutical texts. In the art of "reporting" the researcher is weaving a story together which is embedded in his or her discourse of knowledge and research. For instance, in telling about my story of internship, I (SB) was creating a relational hermeneutical text.
2. Stories about stories: Narrative about the production of stories is an important aspect of analysis and reflexivity. It is the researcher's story about how he or she made sense during the "sense making" process. Another way to understand this is to view it as production narratives.
3. Interwoven reflexive narratives: Reflexive texts that are interspersed among the above narrative practices such that they question the built in assumptions of the relational hermeneutical texts (interpretations).
4. Decentering texts: Boldfacing or higlighting certain words or phrases in the texts, draws the reader's attention from the content of a lexia to the boldfaced/highlighted texts thus shifting the emphasis. Electronically this is done by hyper linking, thereby creating a more dynamic process, as the reader might chose to follow the link thus shifting the context and content of the interpretation.
5. Afterwords: Richardson (1997) utilizes the notion of "afterwords" as reflexive epilogues thus building further reflexivity on all of the above layers.

Similarly, Kvale's (1996) postmodern approach provides a model for data analysis that includes six overlapping steps (p. 189):

1. Subjects describe their lived experience.
2. Subjects themselves discover new meanings during the interview

3. Interviewer, during the interview, condenses and interprets meanings and "sends" the meanings back for confirmation or disconfirmation of the description; a "self-correcting" interview.
4. The interviewer interprets the transcribed interview either alone or with others.
5. Re-interview subjects for their feedback, corrections, and clarifications.
6. New action on the part of participant and/or researcher in personal and/or social world.

Establishing Trustworthiness: Validity and Reliability

Similar to many forms of qualitative research, collaborative research does not produce results that conform to traditional standards of validity and reliability because, quite simply, that is not the goal of constructionist research. Instead, the goal is to produce useful answers to research questions that fairly reflect the lived experience of research participants. Validity and reliability are primarily associated with quantitative data, which is not always preferable for capturing lived experience: "When our language of description is converted to numbers, we do not thereby become more precise. Numbers are no more adequate 'pictures of the world' than words, music, or painting. They are simply a different translation device" (Gergen, 1999, p. 92). Thus, in collaborative inquiry, validity and reliability become living processes embedded in communities and relationship.

Collaborative researchers, like Denzin and Lincoln (1994) prefer the term *trustworthiness* and *authenticity* to reliability and validity to remind themselves and research consumers of the differences between results produced using positivist versus constructionist approaches to knowledge. A variety of methods have been used in

marriage and family therapy research to establish trustworthiness and authenticity (Gehart, Ratliff, & Lyle, 2001), including:

- participant verification of results: participants review and verify that results fairly describe their experience;
- multiple coders and peer debriefing: multiple researchers code transcriptions and/or peers review coding to reduce subjective bias of a single researcher;
- triangulation: multiple data collection techniques (e.g., interviews and surveys) and/or multiple data sources (e.g., interviews with clients and therapists about same therapeutic process) are used to generate knowledge of phenomenon being studied;
- reading against interpretation: during analysis the researchers read against the current interpretation to identify deviant examples and possible biases in the interpretation.

All of these methods potentially can be used to either seek a singular truth or to be used to enhance the collaborative spirit of the project. Thus, the method used is determined by the researcher's intention and is contextualized by localized research performances (Bava, 2005). If the researcher is intending to use any of these methods as capturing the studied phenomenon, then he or she is more likely situated in a positivistic paradigm and is seeking proximity to truth. However, a researcher who is seeking polyphony and believes that every "reading" is a new reading then the above methods leads the researcher to multiple version of the studied phenomenon with each being no more or less "accurate." Rather each version is a "new" version informed by the current conversation and relationships one is involved at that given moment. Often we are able to

use the temporal context to situate research in a historical context, especially if there are years or decades separating two studies of the same phenomenon. However, one loses the perspective of time in an inquiry, which involves participant verification, triangulation or reading against interpretation. All of these methods happen along the dimension of time thus introducing historicity and other contextual factors to the texts being created. Thus each version is a new version rather than a closer version of the truth.

Of the above method, participant verification is most closely aligned with collaborative and postmodern research and is included as a standard part of analysis in Kvale's (1996) analysis procedures. However, it is important to note that similar to the therapeutic process, every re-telling is a new experience. Thus, "verification" is another lived experience or emerging meaning of what has been told rather than the notion that the second telling is more accurate than the first. Participant verification was used in Gehart and Lyle (1999) who used collaborative inquiry to explore clients' and therapists' lived experience of change in collaborative therapy over the course of four months. Kvale's (1996) analysis process (described below) was used to develop a recursive analysis process over a series of three interviews with each participant. "Verification" was an organic process in which participants were invited to comment on emerging analysis of the prior interview while at simultaneously adding new experiences and perspectives since the last interview (spaced approximately one month apart). The emerging analysis became a strand of dialogue introduced into the next research conversation. Additionally, in this study, a type of triangulation was used. Triangulation in collaborative inquiry is not used to verify or come up with the "truest" description, but rather to describe the multiple realities in a given situation. In this case, there were certain

aspects where putting the clients' and therapists' descriptions together painted a "fuller" picture and certain aspects where each voice remained distinct, describing a unique reality.

Additionally, being public (Anderson, 1997) or reflexive (Gergen & Gergen, 2000) about the researcher's position socio-culturally, theoretically, and personally provides accountability by situating the researcher and the research process: "the act of reflexivity asks the reader to accept itself as authentic, that is, as a conscientious effort to 'tell the truth' about the making of the account" (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p. 1028).

Although the researcher is responsible for addressing issues of trustworthiness and authenticity, Atkinson, Heath and Chenail (1991) point out that in post-positivist qualitative research the burden to legitimize knowledge is shared communally with stakeholders in the research endeavor. Research consumers must ask: For whom is it valid and reliable and for what purpose? To answer this question, Kvale (1996) prefers the criterion of pragmatic validity: "truth is whatever assists us to take actions that produce the desired results" (p. 248). The effectiveness of the knowledge produced is the criterion. Kvale identifies two types of pragmatic validity: knowledge accompanied by action and knowledge that instigates action. In the first, the research identifies whether the participant's verbal statement is supported by actions consistent with the statement. For example, if the participant describes a particular change in behavior, this change should be evident in the interview or live events. In the second type, knowledge instigates actual change in behavior. In the case of collaborative research, results are considered "valid" to the degree they inspire the participant, researcher and/or consumer to develop

new understandings and meanings that generally inform new ways for people to better go on together.

Space for Quantitative Approaches

Although we have mostly discussed examples of qualitative research, a collaborative approach can be taken when conducting quantitative studies as well. Quantitative research can capture information of which participants may be unaware. For example, based on their observational study, Werner-Wilson, Price, Zimmerman, and Murphy (1997) found that male and female therapists interrupted females three times more often than male clients. This quantitative information provides a description that most likely would not be generated through dialogue with therapy participants, thus it is invaluable in the broader discourse of gender in psychotherapy. Similarly, large scale efficacy studies provide information that no single client or therapist could provide. Collaboration refers to stance that can be adopted in different ways and at different points of the research process. A quantitative survey, for example, may be constructed based on the input given by possible participants in the study.

Often qualitative and quantitative research work best together. For example, in my (DG) training clinic, we used a pre and post measure of symptoms as part of a grant program. In one case, after three months of therapy, the client's score indicated she had become clinically much worse. When the therapist interviewed the client about the change, she explained that when she came to therapy, she did not want to admit that she was having problems, especially on paper; she was an immigrant from China and felt that she would lose face by doing so. When she was asked to fill out the form a second time, she had developed enough trust in the therapist to more honestly answer the questions.

This situation clearly illustrates how important it is to have participants help researchers make sense of the numbers.

Further Thoughts

Likened to Collaborative Therapy, collaborative inquiry is a way of practicing a philosophical stance of respect, curiosity, polyphony and social meaning making. More than the methods used, it is the intention and the assumptions that inform the research process that constitute the collaborative nature of inquiries. On paper, two researchers may have used similar "methods" yet it is the stance of the researcher that creates the process as collaborative or not. There will be as many possibilities as there are participants (including the researcher) about the construction of research as a collaborative inquiry.

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Along a Continuum… Differences from Our Perspective(s)

Non-Collaborative Approaches	Collaborative Approaches
PARADIGM/PHILOSOPHICAL ORIENTATION	
Discovery Model (Mining)	Exploratory Model (Traveling)
Knowledge is Discovered	Knowledge is Socially Constructed
Positivist	Hermeneutic, Social Constructionist
POSITIONING OF RESEARCHER	
Expert	Partner
Knowing	Curious
Hierarchical	Lowering Hierarchy
Predetermined Agenda	Evolving Agenda
Objective & Independent	Contextual & critical
RESEARCH PROCESS	
Fact Oriented	Construction Oriented
Representational	Re-constructive
Observable/Countable Data	Includes Stories/Meanings
Directional	Expanding
Replicable	Unique
Questions are Diagnostic	Questions are Conversational
Meaning Interpreted by Scientist	Meaning Co-Evolved
Singular Truth of Meaning	Multiplicity of Meaning
Findings are Universal/meta	Findings are Localized

Table 1. Comparison of Non-Collaborative and Collaborative Inquiry Methods