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Marriage & Family Therapy Students Learning Qualitative Research: Frameworks Identified Through Participatory-Observation

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In this study, we used participant-observation to achieve grounded theory as we constructed a model outlining how marriage and family therapy graduate students learn qualitative research methods. We identified three major learning frameworks: Pragmatism, Ethics/Morality, and Identity of the Researcher. We also found that certain learning modalities are most congruent for students holding these major frameworks. "Critical learning incidences" appeared to cause a shift or re-balancing of students' frameworks as they learn qualitative research. Application of these findings may help guide instructors who are teaching students with little previous exposure qualitative methodology. Recommendations for future research are also included. Key words: *Teaching, Qualitative Methods, and Grounded Theory*

"Since we'll never agree about this, you stay on your side of the hall and I'll stay on mine!" said one of my (M.D.) university advisors to a colleague. They were heatedly discussing outside their offices whether quantitative or qualitative methods would be most appropriate for a specific research question. Each had a strong opinion, neither willing to concede to the other's method of doing research.

As this anecdote illustrates, there has been a great debate in the social sciences, more specifically in the field of Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT), about the value and place of quantitative versus qualitative research methods (Atkinson, Heath, & Chenail, 1991; Cavell & Snyder, 1991; Moon, Dillon, & Sprenkle, 1990). In response to this debate, many family therapists are using qualitative methodologies in an in-depth fashion and finding them compatible with foundational family therapy theory (Gale, 1993; Gehart, Ratliff, & Lyle, 2001; Moon et al., 1990; Piercy & Fontes, 2001; Rafuls & Moon, 1996; Sprenkle & Bischoff, 1995). In fact, in their content analysis of research in family therapy journals, Hawley, Bailey, and Pennick (2000) found that over a five year period one-fifth of empirical articles employed some form of qualitative methodology. In a more recent content analysis of MFT literature, Faulkner, Clock, and Gale (2002) also found an increase in the use of qualitative methodologies from 1980 to 1999.

In response to this increased interest in and use of qualitative research, many universities are now offering courses in qualitative research methods (Franklin, 1996;

Hardy & Keller, 1991; Maggio, Chenail, & Todd, 2001). Students and professors are entering these courses with a variety of perspectives and opinions about qualitative methods and assumptions (Franklin; Hardy & Keller). However, there is little information in the literature about how family therapists integrate their previously held opinions and perspectives with the frameworks of qualitative research. Therefore, we began this study with the intent of exploring the developmental processes that family therapy students experience while learning qualitative methods. Our findings pointed us in the direction of the frameworks that students view qualitative research from as they undertake to study it and how these frameworks are challenged or changed in the learning process.

Research Method

Theoretical Orientation

As researchers, we came to this project with prior experience and theoretical exposures, which informed our approach to utilizing grounded theory methodology. Somewhat reflective of the different emphasis placed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, the founders of grounded theory methodology, we each had leanings towards different sides of the positivist/post-positivist continuum (Charmaz, 2000). As Charmaz delineates, Glaser and Strauss both started from a position of "objectivist positivism," with Glaser remaining most strongly positivistic over time. As Charmaz states about Glaser (1978, 1992 as cited by Charmaz, 2000), he

> often comes close to traditional positivism, with its assumptions of an objective, external reality, a neutral observer who discovers data, reductionist inquiry of manageable research problems, and objectivist rendering of data. (p. 510)

Strauss, in contrast, maintains a positivist view, however, in his writings with Julia Corbin (1998, as cited by Charmaz, 2000) moves towards concerns associated with post-positivism, in that they

> also propose giving voice to their respondents, representing them as accurately as possible, discovering and acknowledging how respondents' view of reality conflict with their own, and recognizing art as well as science in the analytic product and process. (p. 510)

In our application of grounded theory to this current endeavor we decided to represent both sides of the positivist/post-positivist continuum. We held to the positivist view that the more rigorous our methodology, the closer we could come to an accurate representation of process that students learning qualitative research experience. However, as students ourselves, with a high degree of participant-observation in the process, and as therapists trained in the ethics of how knowledge is constructed (Freedman & Combs, 1996; White & Epston, 1990), we continuously held our findings

up to the standard of how well they reflected the voices of our participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In holding ourselves responsible to our participants, we added to this project a post-positivist emphasis of how people construct knowledge. That is, both participants and observers construct social interactions and their meanings (Atkinson, Heath, & Chenail, 1991; Efran & Clarfield, 1992; Franklin, 1996). Our training as therapists informed our view that we can only describe the ever changing and evolving processes that shaped our findings. We also recognized that the act of observation altered our findings themselves (Bateson, 1972; Efran & Clarfield; Keeney, 1983; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Therefore, in our application of grounded theory we held a positivist orientation in our approach to data collection, but maintained a post-positivist emphasis in our treatment of participants and in our handling of findings.

Context of The Study

This study was conducted in the context of a graduate-level course at a COAMFTE accredited program at a large midwestern university. The course was entitled, "Qualitative Research on Families" and provided an introduction to qualitative research theory and methods so that graduate students could conduct and evaluate qualitative family research. The course instructor has published extensively in the field of MFT and has received recognition for his use of qualitative methodologies. According to the learning objectives, upon completion of the course, students were expected to understand the assumptions and characteristics of qualitative research, the contributions that qualitative research has made to understanding families, the ethical, political, and practical dilemmas of qualitative research, qualitative research design and methods, and techniques for data collection and analysis. Specific topics covered in the course included theoretical orientations, research design, observation, qualitative interviewing, case studies, ethnography, focus groups, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethics, data analysis, coding, enhancing credibility, and feminist/political issues in qualitative research.

These learning objectives were accomplished through a combination of readings, course assignments, and in-class activities. The required texts for the course were Patton (1990) and a reading packet containing a variety of theoretical and applied articles related to qualitative research. Course assignments were in a "menu" format, from which students could select a combination of assignments that were of interest to them. Some of the assignments options available to students included a small-scale research project, a research proposal, a publishable paper related to qualitative research, an ethnomethodology experiment, a critique of qualitative orientations, a qualitative research article critique, an annotated bibliography of additional reading, an interview transcription and analysis, and an observation. In addition to the selection of assignments available to students, everyone was expected to write weekly reactions to the readings and participate in class discussions. In-class activities gave students hands-on experience and were aimed at increasing students' comfort and ability with qualitative research skills. These in-class activities also gave the instructor the opportunity to monitor student progress and provide feedback.

We decided to conduct this study in order to receive credit for the small-scale research project assignment. As part of the assignment, we were required to meet with the course instructor to discuss our initial ideas, write and edit a research proposal before beginning the study, update the instructor with progress reports, and report the findings in the format of a journal article. As students who were relatively new to qualitative methodologies, these requirements helped us to prepare ourselves for the study and ensured that our study was conducted in a rigorous and credible manner.

Participants

In this study, the participants were ten graduate students, including the two primary investigators. Eight of the ten students in the course were pursuing masters or doctoral degrees in marriage and family therapy (MFT) at Purdue University. One student was pursuing a bachelor's degree in forestry; another was a non-degree graduate student. In addition to the students, the professor of the course also participated in the project. Because this study was in fulfillment of course requirements and was conducted only within the context of the course, course instructor permission and verbal consent of participants were considered sufficient per university human subject's policy. For every additional source of data that was collected (i.e., reaction papers, focus group, discussion notes, etc.), participants were given the option to continue or discontinue their inclusion in the study.

Data Collection

Our primary source of data was students' weekly email reaction papers. In addition, we also included as data: (a) literature on qualitative research methods in the field of MFT; (b) notes taken during class discussions with accompanying diagrams indicating where students were seated; (c) a focus group held with participants (Krueger, 1993; Morgan & Krueger, 1993); and (d) an interview with the professor of the course. We employed these additional sources of data to achieve triangulation (Patton, 2001). According to Mathison (1988,), "triangulation is typically perceived to be a strategy for improving the validity of research . . ." (p. 13). The assumption associated with having triangulation is that, "the bias inherent in any particular data source, investigator, and particular method will be canceled out when used in conjunction with other data sources, investigators, and methods" (Mathison, p. 14). We are not suggesting that triangulation removed all forms of bias from our study. However, by triangulating our data, we have overtly addressed and accounted for the bias that exists.

Reaction Papers

This primary source of data was completed by students each week as part of our course requirements. These papers were 1-2 pages in length and were in response to the assigned readings, class discussions, and class activities. Participants posted their reaction papers on an e-mail listserv distributed to the class and the instructor. The instructor encouraged class members to read and respond to the reactions of other students. We printed all reactions and responses that were posted to the listserv and

stored them in folders, with one folder for each participant's reaction papers. As the reaction papers were an ongoing assignment throughout the semester, data collection from this source was an ongoing process as was data analysis. Specifically, we began collecting reaction papers and responses during the first week of class and completed our collection of the reaction papers during the last week of the course.

Qualitative Literature

Since conducting this study, we have become more aware of the debate between grounded theory methodologists about the use of literature in research (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As Strauss and Corbin explain, too much of a literature review may contaminate the researcher's perceptions of the data and alter findings. For this reason, grounded theorists often suggest that the literature be sampled after findings have been made (Charmaz, 2000; Strauss & Corbin). However, to meet the requirements for graduation (i.e., thesis, dissertation) or for grant applications, most academes must be conversant with professional literature in their areas of inquiry (Strauss & Corbin). As students in a qualitative research course, we were in the position of having required readings, which included literature about the debate in MFT about research frameworks and epistemologies. Also, as novices in grounded theory, we needed to become familiar with at least the basics of the approach in order to conduct our study. Therefore, we did not have a choice about when to approach the literature related to our topic of study.

Despite the constraints imposed upon us by course requirements, we followed recommendations of grounded theorists by returning to the literature with our preliminary findings. As our preliminary findings pointed us in the direction of frameworks (see the description of data analysis for more information), this caused us to look more specifically at the debate within MFT and how our classroom was a microcosm of the larger field. In addition to the relevant literature that was part of the required course readings, we also used a library search engine to identify articles related to debates about epistemology in research.

Class Discussion Notes

To supplement the information contained in reaction papers, we took notes on the content and processes that arose during class discussions. Specifically, we each examined where people sat in the classroom, the content of class discussions, and the way that interactions shaped the course of class. For instance, during the discussions we noted not only the content of what was stated but also the how the interactions between classmates drove the discussion. Early on we noted that particular topics or content areas would provoke certain students, or groups of students, to debate more passionately. Often these classroom debates would find their way into the next email reactions. As therapists, we were sensitive to these interactional processes. Our weekly handwritten notes were stored in a folder and were organized chronologically. Like the reaction papers, this form of data collection was ongoing and continued from the second week of class, when we had contracted to do this project, until the last class meeting.

Focus Group

Our third source of data was a focus group (Krueger, 1993; Morgan & Krueger, 1993; Piercy & Nickerson, 1996). Prior to conducting this focus group, the instructor had the class participate in focus group around gender issues in MFT training programs. I (D.P.) ran this practice focus group and received feedback from students and the instructor, who had previous experience with the use of focus groups (Piercy & Nickerson). Therefore, although we were relatively new to the use of focus groups, we had gained some experience with this method of inquiry. As a quality check, we asked for feedback from our participants who indicated comfort and satisfaction with the process. In addition, our training as therapists informed our approach to leading the focus group.

The focus group for this study occurred following the completion of data collection and the first round of data analysis. During the one-time focus group, we brought our preliminary findings to the participants. Participants were given the opportunity to agree, disagree, add, or take away from themes and processes we identified. The focus group was recorded for further consultation and analysis.

Instructor Interview

In order to achieve a more complete view of our topic of study, we included one final source of data. This source of data was a one-time semi-structured interview with the instructor of the class conducted towards the end of the course, after we had constructed our categories. During the interview, we explored the processes, development, and opinions that the instructor experienced while teaching the class. Furthermore, we also explored his development as a qualitative researcher. The interview was recorded and combined with our sources of data.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze our data, we combined our multiple sources of data so that we could focus on the process level to form a grounded theory regarding how the thinking of graduate students develops as they are introduced to qualitative methods. The use of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) is the process by which researchers develop explanations and constructs for topics where theory did not exist before (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Searight & Young, 1994; Strauss, 1987). In line with this type of theoretical construction, we used a method of constant comparison to continuously revise our model as new information emerged (Glaser & Strauss; Searight & Young; Strauss) from each of our data sources.

More specifically, we began our data analysis by examining printed copies of the weekly reaction papers, each week as we received them (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Preliminarily, we individually read through the reaction papers in their entirety. Then, we individually reread the reaction papers and identified tentative themes by making notes in the margins. We each went through this process of making notes and identifying tentative themes twice – once with the reaction papers organized by participant and again with the reaction papers organized chronologically. After familiarizing ourselves with

the data and making initial notes, we then met and discussed the themes that were emerging. Where our themes overlapped, we developed categories. Following the development of some tentative categories, we individually reread the reaction papers again, searching for additional information to confirm or disconfirm these categories.

After this round of reading the reaction papers, we found that we still could not explicate a coherent model of the developmental stages that students experience when learning qualitative research. After reviewing our tentative themes, we discovered that our themes centered around different class activities, or "critical incidents," which challenged students' values about research. Therefore, in order to explore these "critical incidents" more in-depth, we turned to our other sources of data. As we had not yet conducted the focus group or the interview with our instructor, we chose to first revisit the literature about paradigms in qualitative research. This examination of the literature (e.g., Atkinson et al., 1991; Cavell & Snyder, 1991; Moon et al., 1990) reminded us of the multiple paradigms in the field reflecting the continuum of positivist to social constructionist views on truth. As a result of our review of the literature, we became sensitized to our classmates' views of truth and the role that critical incidents might have played in motivating or shaping their research frameworks and interests.

Once we identified the idea that certain paradigms were being challenged during "critical incidents", we took that idea and our initial themes, as identified from the weekly reaction papers, to the focus group. During the focus group, students concurred that specific class incidents challenged their research beliefs and values, and that they had different motivations for learning and using qualitative research methods. This confirmation pushed us in the direction of seeing how critical incidents and motivations for studying qualitative research might be interrelated.

Once we realized that "critical incidents" were influential in revealing the motivations that students' brought to learning qualitative research methods, we returned again to the reaction papers and class discussion notes, sensitized toward identifying those motivations. We also continued to turn to our other sources of data (i.e. literature and focus group tape) to confirm or disconfirm our newly formed linkages. During this round of data analysis, we individually reread the weekly reaction papers, previous data analysis themes, and the class discussion notes, making notes about possible frameworks that students entering this course were operating from as they were learning qualitative research. We then met to discuss the emerging frameworks, and after reviewing our notes, discovered that students seemed to be operating from three specific frameworks. As we constructed our model of frameworks and their associated "critical incidents," we continuously rechecked our other sources of data for supporting and contradicting information.

Because the reaction papers were our primary source of data, and we used the audiotapes of the focus group and interview with our professor to triangulate our findings (Patton, 2001), we made the decision not to transcribe the audiotapes of either the focus group or interview. As Strauss and Corbin (1990) explain, to transcribe or not, and how much to transcribe, is a judgment call that a researcher must make. Strauss and Corbin also state that not all materials need be transcribed. We made this particular decision to not transcribe based on two factors: First, as we viewed the audiotaped data as a source for triangulation (Patton) and not as a primary data source, we felt the decision to not transcribe did not impinge upon the integrity of our work. Secondly, as this course was

limited in time frame, and that our financial resources were also limited, we had genuine pragmatic concerns with attempting to either transcribe ourselves or have transcribed our audiotapes. We utilized the audiotapes by listening to them while we kept in front of us our reaction papers. As we previously had coded our reaction papers and drawn themes in the margins, these were in view as we listened to the tapes. When something challenged or confirmed our findings, we would rewind the tape, replay it, and make notations in the margins of the reaction papers. We listened to each tape twice, repeating the process and conferring with each other as we worked.

The audiotaped interview with our course instructor occurred towards the end of the semester, just after we had identified our frameworks and were constructing our model of how "critical incidents" impact students' frameworks. We used the interview with our instructor to explore with him his awareness of students' motivations for studying qualitative research methods and how this motivated him in the construction of our class. In this interview he also discussed his growth and evolution as a researcher, moving from his early quantitative training and epistemology to the more recent incorporation of qualitative methods and epistemologies in his work. He also shared his views of the "critical incidents" we had identified and his perceptions of how they had impacted students. His views both confirmed our analysis and the model that we had developed.

Findings

In the process of reviewing the literature, we noted distinctions as to the positions scholars take on qualitative methods within the field of MFT. We noted three general positions, or "camps." The camp represented by Moon, Dillon, and Sprenkle (1990; 1991) puts forth that within the field, there is room for both qualitative and quantitative methods; however methods should be used in reliable, comprehensive ways. In another camp, Cavell and Snyder (1991) state that, "Qualitative research designs are subject to numerous threats to internal and external validity that greatly limit the conclusions we can draw from them. Consequently, qualitative methods cannot provide a foundation for the scientific study of family therapy." (p. 184). Finally, in an opposing camp, Atkinson, Heath, and Chenail (1991) say that qualitative research should be the methodology of choice, as the post-modern assumptions of the qualitative paradigm fit with systemic models of therapy.

Clearly, there are different voices within MFT as to the ways in which people view qualitative methods. We began to look at the underlying assumptions voiced about these methods. In addition to learning about the different assumptions associated with qualitative research, we also became aware that there is great variation among methods which are categorized as "qualitative research." Thus, qualitative research is not a monolithic term. What is generally called "qualitative research" is actually a varied group of methods, viewpoints, and frameworks.

Reflective of the larger field of MFT, we found that participants in our study had varied views about qualitative research. In expanding the themes we identified in the literature, we discovered three frameworks, which we labeled Pragmatism, Ethics/Morality, and Identity of the Researcher. Additionally, we noted "critical incidents," which challenged participants to view qualitative research from another

framework. We include the following to define "critical incidents:" reading assignments, reaction papers/reactions to other participants' reactions, class discussions, in-class assignments/experiential activities, and graded assignments conducted outside of the classroom. Some incidents proved much more "critical" than others, in that the impact on participants was great. In the following sections, we will discuss the identified frameworks, what incidents were congruent for each group, what incidents proved the most challenging and "critical," and what framework shifts occurred.

Pragmatism

> I feel at heart that I am a pragmatist and will use and value whatever seems most appropriate and respectful at the time.

The primary concern of Pragmatic group members was the utility of the method. Many expressed that they were not interested in the theoretical assumptions behind methods but rather which method would aid them in answering research questions most appropriately. For example, three participants from the Pragmatic perspective stated:

> I would not want to limit myself in any way by predetermining the kinds of questions that I could ask.
>
> I think that research should not be defined as a method, but rather by the questions it is trying to answer.
>
> For me, combining a variety of methods is my 'ultimate' in research. When the strengths of several ways of doing research are combined, I find it to be much more powerful.

For the Pragmatists, the assigned readings were most congruent with their framework of viewing research. More specifically, this group appeared to sift out elements from the articles that had the most utility for them. For example, one participant identified what she deemed useful and practical in a qualitative article written about sexual offenders:

> If the results had been presented statistically, the power and impact of the offender's words would have been lost. In this situation, the use of qualitative methods allows the reader to gain an excellent understanding of the complex nature of sexual abuse. Without the use of these methods, the understanding of sexual abuse would have been less complete, less specific and certainly less vivid. Commenting on Conte, Wolf, & Smith, 1989)

In contrast, members from other frameworks commented primarily on the content of the article itself versus the methods used. Thus, the Pragmatists strengthened their existing framework by supporting their views with information from the readings.

The greatest challenge for the Pragmatic framework was presented in the form of experiential activities and class discussions. This became evident as we conducted the focus group. Most of the reaction papers from the Pragmatists referred to the readings, while in the focus group, they discussed other incidents that were salient or "critical" to their learning. One participant shared how these experiential activities influenced his learning:

> The two things that helped the most were the in-class exercises and the assignments. . . That's probably [what] made my learning curve a little steeper than it would have been otherwise . . . I learned things faster this way.

In general, the framework most challenging to the Pragmatists was that of Ethics/Morality. A primary critical incident, which reverberated across frameworks, involved a class project and the ensuing discussions regarding ethics in ethnomethodology research. After this activity, Pragmatists were noted to have an increase in their discussion and apparent "wrestling" over issues of ethics:

> I have always felt that covert research is, on some level, unethical. However, I also feel that overt observational research is not ideal because of the potential influence of the researcher on the participants. So for me, a major challenge is reconciling these two ways of conducting research . . . I don't feel that I am any closer to a resolution of this issue and that is very frustrating.

In sum, our findings suggest that Pragmatists came into the course primarily to learn qualitative research methods from a standpoint of utility. However, they found their framework challenged by incidents that were experiential and that involved peer interaction. For the people in this group, the shift that occurred was a wrestling with and apparent incorporation of ethical considerations into their Pragmatic framework. However, across the group, the shift was minor, in that the focus primarily remained on utility and practicality of specific methods.

Ethics/Morality

> I am most impressed when science has the guts to be completely accountable to those it purports to serve; and when it honors (not dishonors), and credits (not discredits), the local knowledge of the recipients. Not to do this creates a tremendously privileged and horrendous chimera of science.

We grouped ethical and moral concerns together into one framework, as the individuals in this group continuously made assertions regarding "right" and "wrong," the treatment of research participants, the nature of truth, and the role of science. This group identified themselves primarily as people concerned with ethics and morality, secondarily as researchers with assumptions and values, and lastly as researchers asking questions.

Most of the individuals in this group identified themselves first as therapists, by profession, and asserted that research was only a tool for furthering their desires to help others and activate social change. Two examples of these beliefs include:

> Participatory research could very well be entitled, "Research of the people, by the people, and for the people."
>
> A research study, in my understanding, is probably truly useful in its ability to be translated into social action and change. The nature of phenomenological inquiry and other qualitative methods approximate this goal more successfully than other research methods.

A commonly emerging theme was this group's sensitivity to how power is created by science and how that power can be abused in political and cultural contexts:

> I don't like the idea that we have to always be proving ourselves to the dominant discourse. I am not one who enjoys laying spread-eagle under someone's lens. I'd rather put the scrutinizing lens under the lens.

Furthermore, the definition of "truth" was another pivotal concern of this group. Most discussed truth in social-constructionist terms, and some stated that qualitative methods were more "honest," in that they made the researcher's biases more overt as opposed to the norm of "objectivity" in the quantitative paradigm. Lastly, an important facet of the Ethics/Morality framework is that most members of this group saw their identity as being intertwined with their views of truth and what is right and wrong. Two participants demonstrate examples of this concept:

> This example certainly challenges us to re-think not only our perspectives on certain issues but also points out the need to put aside our realities if we truly want to understand somebody else's.
>
> If done well, I believe, qualitative can stand on its own. Why must it cow to the false quantitative god and worry about proving or disproving? It's a false god anyway. We cannot prove or disprove anything when it comes to complex human behavior. We can only suggest . . . to say otherwise is to be a 'positivist,' and I decided that is a 'dirty word.' I believe it's an unattainable goal–finding the truth of the matter through scientific, empirical methods.

This group was expressive and appeared to find the venues of reaction papers and class discussion most congruent with their learning and thinking processes. The members of this framework took a role in the group dynamic of pushing others to consider ethical issues in all aspects of class. They were generally vocal and tended to sit

together in the class. Although the beliefs of this group varied widely, they appeared united by the thread of searching for moral and ethical responsibility in research.

This group was most critically challenged by the readings, as supported by lengthy reactions and class discussions regarding these assignments. The readings that appeared challenging were applications of concepts and theories related to qualitative methods, articles with a quantitative "flavor," and articles touching on but not addressing topics where social change is needed.

> . . . Patton kept up his systematic and rigorous work providing thick description for qualitative interviews . . . I know Patton says we are neutral and shouldn't change people; I disagree . . . So, as to interview types, none of Patton's categories fit me too well. Issues are discussed, but they are not pre-set by me. The client sets the agenda. My general interview guide is following the client's expertise about his own life. My rigor is . . . fulfilling that task. (Commenting on Patton, 1990)

This group shifted the least in their views. They entertained discourse with other frameworks, but continued to view discussion through the lens of Ethics/Morality. Despite the lack of a framework shift, a change occurred at the level of utility and skills. This group incorporated the framework of Pragmatism, in so much as it allowed them to put their views on ethics and morality into action. In the focus group one of the members stated that they had gained tools in the class to "fuel their fervor."

Identity of the Researcher

> I conclude that all you can know, you know from the vantage point of your own being and experience, those are the clothes you cannot shed . . . Maybe that is as close as it ever gets–interpretations and appreciations of others' experiences, the closer the better but ever so unattainable.

This group explored the other frameworks throughout the class. However, the unifying thread for this group was continual self-reflective statements and views about how other frameworks related to their identities as researchers. Although this group repeatedly stated opinions in terms of their own identities and personalities, there was an expressed respect for others' opinions and experiences.

> Some things just seem a better 'fit' for me as a researcher than other methods. But, I definitely feel that other methods have value and merit.

One topic that this group particularly focused on was how methods and assumptions fit or did not fit with their personalities as researchers. Two participants stated:

> I believe that a good researcher must have that unquenchable thirst to know, or be bored to death.
>
> The burden on the researcher to explain the comparisons is significant, and the ability to connect the data otherwise seems to me to underscore the importance of a human researcher. In other words, it takes a human to even come close to understand/explain a complex, social phenomenon. No model, algorithm, or formula can replace the human ability to make connections.

This group was the most eclectic in what was congruent and challenging to them. Like the Pragmatists, many people in this group used the readings to pick and choose ideas that supported their own identities. However, as demonstrated by the following participants, others expressed that certain ideas from the readings were particularly challenging to their ideas about who they were as researchers:

> I guess I am feeling brainwashed by all this new information and almost disloyal to my background. While at the same time, when I put my quantitative hat on, I struggle with the small-scaleness . . . of qualitative research and the lack of broad applicability. I am confused . . . but that is okay for now.
>
> Quantitative is totally out of the question . . . I find many aspects of qualitative research appealing to my personality.

Although the readings were influential for this group, we found that the most challenging incidents for this group were related to two class activities. Immediately following these "critical incidents," we noted major framework shifts in this group's reaction papers and class discussions. First, as part of the course, participants were instructed to conduct an ethnomethodological observation, which raised ethical issues relative to one class member, who gave erroneous information when someone asked him what he was doing. A debate about ethics and morality in research ensued in this group's reaction papers and in class discussion. For example, two participants stated:

> This has been a good learning experience for me and has helped me to define my own ethics more clearly . . . If anything, this experience has highlighted the vagueness of and ambiguity within ethical decision making . . . this has taught me the importance of really thinking through my methods and research and being able to defend my actions both morally, ethically, and within our codes.
>
> In terms of research–even if a participant consents, does that absolve the researcher of their ethical or moral obligations? In my opinion, no.

The second "critical incident" noted was an in-class focus group (an experiential activity, not related to this study) about issues of gender and academics. Following this activity, a gender-related pattern of framework shifts emerged. Two female members of the Identity of the Researcher group began to incorporate ideas from the Pragmatic framework into their discussions of their identities as researchers. The converse was observed for the two male members of the Identity of the Researcher group. The males' exploration of their identities as researchers began to focus on the framework of Ethics/Morality and issues of social activism. For example, one male participant stated:

> I want to do my part by adding my voice to yours and calling for change, and eliminating oppressive behaviors and attitudes in myself.

In the beginning, the Identity of the Researcher group entertained debates regarding all of the frameworks. Some focused more on Pragmatism, some on Ethics/Morality, but all continuously related these frameworks to their identities and worldview. After critical experiential activities, there were identifiable shifts moving emphasis to different frameworks. Members that had rested strongly in one framework re-balanced their discussions to focus on other frameworks. For example, prior to a critical experiential activity, one member's reactions focused on blending Pragmatic concerns with his identity as a researcher. After a critical experience, this participant began including elements of the Ethics/Morality framework into reflections on his identity. Thus, although shifts occurred that reflected themes from other frameworks, this group kept their identities as the primary focus of reference and discussion.

Discussion

Summary of the Model

In viewing the three major frameworks that people had as they entered the qualitative research course, in looking at congruent learning venues and "critical incidents," and in considering the shifts that occurred, we developed a tentative model regarding how students learn qualitative research. We posit that students view qualitative research from one of three frameworks–Pragmatism, Ethics/Morality, and Identity of the Researcher. We recognize that these frameworks are actually aspects inherent in the nature of qualitative research itself. Students enter a course with one of these frameworks as being primary to them, and a good research course will provide teaching modalities that challenge students to incorporate and consider the other frameworks. In this way, the process of learning involves balancing these three frameworks/aspects of qualitative research namely, Pragmatism, Ethics/Morality, and Identity of the Researcher. During the process of balancing, students find learning venues that support (are congruent with) their primary framework and reinforce their previous views. As "critical incidents" (i.e. learning modalities and activities) challenge this framework, students are brought to evaluate and become more aware of their own framework and to balance it with ideas from the other frameworks. Thus, we view frameworks as not only part of a student's research paradigm as it is being formed, but also as a part of their reason for studying qualitative research itself. No group we studied actually changed from one

framework to another but each group incorporated aspects of the other frameworks into their own, still keeping their own as primary.

Pragmatism

From our perspective, the Pragmatists came into the class evaluating the utility of what was taught. They viewed qualitative research not in terms of underlying theoretical assumptions, nor were they interested in the debate in the field. Their primary concern was, "What method will best answer the question I am asking?" This group found the readings as a congruent learning venue. In line with a Pragmatic stance, these group members selected concepts from the readings that were useful to them. We found that the Pragmatists were most challenged by learning modes that were experiential, such as in-class discussions, in-class learning activities, and class assignments. It was in these forums that ethical/moral concerns were raised. For example, one participant stated, "pragmatism and ethics are opposite sides on the same coin." In general, the Pragmatic class members maintained their primary focus on utility; however a shift occurred across the group, as they began incorporating ideas from the framework of Ethics/Morality into their way of viewing qualitative research.

Ethics/Morality

The members of the Ethics/Morality group entered the course with the desire to learn research methods that promote social change. This group was primarily concerned with protecting the rights of those researched, promoting honesty in research, and in doing research that empowered and positively altered the lives of participants. Members of this group issued overt challenges to consider the power that science has to help or harm others and to consider the underlying assumptions of those conducting research. Congruent learning venues were the reaction papers and class discussion, where these group members were able to clarify their views and challenge others to consider ethical and moral issues in research. Working out their ideas in vocal and written format appeared to support their concerns from the vantage of their personal framework. The greatest challenge to this group took the form of assigned readings, as evidenced by reaction papers and class discussions. In these venues, members of this group wrestled with issues of pragmatics and utility. The Ethics/Morality group struggled with ideas that put method over concern for participants. Interestingly, this group experienced the greatest shift in their framework in the area of Pragmatism. As several expressed, utility of method became paramount when it allowed them to further their concern for participants and to activate social change.

Identity of the Researcher

This framework, the Identity of the Researcher, was the most eclectic of the three frameworks in terms of views on qualitative research. The common thread was the primary focus on their identities as researchers and how they incorporated the other frameworks to fit their personalities and worldviews. In class discussions, reaction papers, and the focus group, members of this framework commonly made self-reflective

statements. Class readings were most congruent for this group because, like the Pragmatists, group members selected concepts that fit with their identities as researchers. "Critical incidents" were experiential in-class activities. We identified two "critical incidents" which particularly challenged group members. Members with a primary focus on the Pragmatic facet of their identity re-balanced to consider issues of ethics. Members who had expressed ethical and moral issues, in terms of their identities, re-balanced their discussion to include issues of utility.

Researcher Background

As a two-member research team, we come equipped with our own biases, which we view as reflective of the debate regarding qualitative research in the field of MFT. One of the authors (D.P.) was trained in Family Therapy at a university where the focus was on social-constructionist, post-modern theories, and qualitative research. The other author (M.D.) received her previous education at a university emphasizing quantitative methods and positivist/post-positivist philosophies.

We view our backgrounds as being reflected in the frameworks we each brought to this course. In the process of data analysis, M.D. was identified as a member of the Pragmatic group and D.P. was identified as a member of the Identity of the Researcher group. Through our different frameworks and backgrounds we were able to achieve a greater degree of researcher triangulation. Through this researcher triangulation, we believe that greater insight into the processes that occurred in these two frameworks was gained. A limitation that we identified is that neither researcher is a member of the Ethics/Morality framework. Therefore, the definitions accompanying this framework were not based on participation in the purest sense.

In the process of preparing this manuscript, we have been in the unique position of being able to observe how our frameworks have changed over the course of our time in our training program. I (M.D.) continue to identify myself as member of the Pragmatic group, however, my awareness of and interest in the Ethics/Morality framework has become much stronger. As a result, in addition to my practical outlook, I have incorporated aspects of the Ethics/Morality framework into my research interests. Another change that I have identified since conducting this study is that I have developed a stronger interest in qualitative methods. I volunteered for several qualitative research projects and, while I am not using qualitative research in my dissertation, I do have several ideas for qualitative projects that I would like to conduct in the future.

I (DP) would also continue to classify myself in the Identity of the Researcher group. During the class, I was greatly influenced by the Ethics/Morality discussions. However, in my evolution as a researcher, I have found myself coming full-circle, and I am also interested in the utility of method. I find that I think some methods (qualitative or quantitative) are just more appropriate for investigating particular types of questions. However, I find myself evaluating any type of research – quantitative or qualitative by both pragmatic and high ethical standards. I still find I prefer research that "gives voice" to participants, and my dissertation will be using mixed-methods inquiry, including grounded theory methodology. Most of all, like our participants in the Identity of the Researcher group, I find that whatever I research needs to be an outgrowth of who I am

as a person and reflective of ways that I would like to make a difference in the world around me.

The Influence of Class Context

Taking into account others who influenced the development of the class, we recognize our professor for having created the initial context of our learning. In our interview with our professor, he indicated that in the beginning of his career, the research he was taught and conducted was quantitative. In investigating our professor's biases, he expressed a primarily Pragmatic view in that he stated he does not think philosophical debates on research are useful. He likes qualitative methods for their ability to answer certain questions and to empower those being researched. Furthermore, he selected readings with the purpose of providing students with "good models" of qualitative research. Consistent with articles he has written on the topics of graduate education and teaching research, he included several types of learning experiences, which ranged from didactic to experiential, which encouraged the application of concepts (Piercy & Sprenkle, 1984; Sprenkle & Piercy, 1984). This is consistent with his value that there is a "synergistic interplay among theory, research, and practice" (Piercy & Sprenkle). These values of experiential and pragmatic concerns were translated into learning venues that provided the "critical incidents" for all three frameworks. When students in the focus group were asked how the context of the class influenced their learning, many answered that the instructor provided "space" and "safety" for them to express and explore a variety of concepts through readings and activities.

Another factor of value involved the opportunities provided for peer discussion and contact. For example, the Pragmatists were most challenged by experiential activities in which they engaged in dialogue with members from the Ethics/Morality group. By incorporating experiential, in-class activities and reaction papers as learning venues, the instructor maximized the potential for students to teach and challenge each other.

Future Directions

When we organized the reaction papers across weeks, we made observations relative to gender and systemic interactions. Although we have briefly discussed these components, had we employed theoretical triangulation, such as viewing the data from a feminist lens or from a systemic perspective, we could have expanded upon these dynamics. We recognize that both these factors were influential in what we observed, and these topics are open to further exploration and research.

Thanks to our own stories, we were able to identify some additional avenues for future research with this model. One idea for future research would be a longitudinal study examining how students' frameworks change over the course of their time in a training program. Within this study, besides examining "critical incidents" that occur within the classroom, it would be interesting to explore "critical incidents" that occur in the larger system of the training program as well as in students' personal lives. Another suggestion for future research would be to examine whether students' frameworks predict their use of qualitative methods for theses and dissertation, as well as in their professional careers. The applicability of the model to other topics in MFT education, such as theory

and ethics, could also be examined. Finally, research could examine the congruence between students' identified framework and their clinical orientation.

Based on the findings from this study, the model we have outlined may be applied to other graduate-level courses in research methods. Although each group of students is unique, it is our belief that the three frameworks identified in this project are facets of both qualitative and quantitative research. Any course addressing these topics would be strengthened by targeting these frameworks. Specifically, an instructor providing learning modalities that are congruent with and challenging to these three frameworks, will find that students' enthusiasm for and application of research methods will increase. All participants in our focus group stated that, as a result of the course, they would be incorporating qualitative methods into their own research.

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