"THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY": A DOCTORAL STUDENT'S REFLECTIONS ON DOING GROUNDED THEORY RESEARCH IN HENRY'S LIGHT

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Kelly: "It just isn't talked about," I thought to myself as I diligently searched through the available literature located in a popular database of research in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, and social work. I only uncovered one or two articles discussing the difficulties that MAY arise (not do!) in group qualitative data analysis settings. Is it taboo to even mention the conflicts that can and DO emerge in data analysis and interpretation where two or more researchers are involved? Working as a doctoral student research assistant on a grounded theory project, I DID encounter this kind of conflict. By reflecting on my discontent, I was able to learn more about myself as a person, student, and social work researcher.

Mark: Research teams, especially in qualitative inquiry, can bring a richness of perspective and other individual strengths that can help to produce rigorous studies of high quality and worthwhile findings. The interpersonal processes of these teams working together can make or break these efforts. This paper is about the latter. It is also about the clashing of paradigms; the painful misperceptions, indignities, and hostilities of race; and ultimately, about the unconsciously and compellingly attractive, insidious, and unblameable out (of these and all kinds of problematic human encounters) that is disengagement and abandonment.

Introductions: Kelly

I entered the first year of my doctoral program eager and willing to get my hands dirty in research. I had previously served as a research assistant on an R01 grant that examined the impact of substance and alcohol abuse on children using quantitative methods. I had conducted multiple three-hour CATI interviews and I was excited about the new experience of using open-ended interviews available to qualitative researchers. I was quickly linked with a new and energetic junior faculty member who was rumored to be "the golden boy" at the University. Golden because Mark was viewed positively by the higher ups in administration and had a green light from the school to conduct his research however he found fit. He was a highly recognized educator—Mark had received the "educator of the year" award at the School of Social Work—and qualitative researcher who had several ongoing projects in the field environment of an urban city high school. When I first met Mark, I couldn't help but think how much we had in common: like myself, he had attended an Ivy League school for his undergrad studies and played collegiate sports (he played football and I played basketball)! In addition, albeit being a "white guy," his research focused on minority youth, the majority of whom were African American. I thought, "This is it! I found my niche!"

With the help of a senior faculty member, Henry, we designed a new, longitudinal study examining the effects of school discipline on students receiving special education services and their families utilizing grounded theory. I was not crazy about the focus of the study because I had no real interest in school discipline, but having limited experience in

qualitative research, I was excited to jump in. Little did I know the events that would unfold would challenge me both personally as a minority and professionally as a social work researcher. The following will capture my reflections of "the good, the bad, and the ugly" times I experienced as a grounded-theory research assistant.

Mark

This is a paper about "doing" research in a troubled urban high school. But mostly it is about three people "doing" the research: a new assistant professor (Mark), a new doctoral student (Kelly), and a full professor (Henry). The research involved interviewing students of color and their families about (first) school discipline and (then) the realities of their school closing and what that was like for them. Mark is male, white, 47, out-of-the-box, unafraid, but still learning. Kelly is young, female, biracial, capable, nervous, and as you will learn, confused (at times) and angry (with me, after awhile, constantly). Henry, a long-tenured professor in the school of social work, is established, traditional, impatient with what is new and uncomfortable with challenge. This piece is about a number of things: the complexities and uncertainties of "doing" qualitative research; the clashing of research paradigms and the ideologies and biases and preferences that lie behind them; the challenges of field research in a school; the relationships of researchers and research participants; and the ways in which relationships and research endeavors fail. It is also about race and racism; about the indignities and hostilities of those kind of researchers vs. our kind of researchers; about the sheer and daunting anxiety of uncertainty; about desire for control; and ultimately about why truths contained (by tradition, quantification, and polite distancing) are preferred over truths unfettered.

We will present our stories by describing key moments in our work. Kelly will speak.

Then I will speak. Karen acted as editor, mediator, counselor, and protector. Henry was not asked to participate until a draft of the paper had been written, and he declined to contribute at that point.

The "Pivot" Meeting: Kelly

A mandatory staff meeting was announced late in the afternoon over the loud speaker at Trend High (as I will call it), our field site. The principal informed students and staff that they should "act appropriately" and not respond to media cameras surrounding the school. The principal also announced a mandatory meeting for staff, which was to be held in the cafeteria immediately following the dismissal of students. The whole day was full of "buzz" about the presence of the cameras—along with the rumor that the school board was considering closing the school. At the faculty meeting, the principal stood over the teachers and staff who were sitting at the cafeteria tables. I remember feeling all this anticipation about what the principal would say to the group, almost as if my job/career hung in the balance. The principal announced the decision by the school board to "review" Trend High and decide whether or not it was "worthy" of staying open. The principal remained very formal in her announcement, but then leaned in slightly to the group and in a lower voice said, "Please look out for yourselves—I recommend looking for another job." The principal sounded sincere, mentioning she wanted to "look out for staff." It felt as if the Principal had some additional information she was unwilling to share and that it had already been decided, unbeknownst to the rest of us, that the school closing was inevitable. The principal ended the meeting by reminding teachers and staff they should respond "no comment" to the media gathered outside the front of the school.

I was very eager to meet with Mark to relay what I had just observed during the high school faculty meeting. I was out of breath,

perhaps from running up six flights of stairs, as I tried to share my news and accurately report the happenings. I remember Mark turned to me in his swivel chair and asked me what we should do now. *[The swivel chair was always turning and twisting during intense moments during our data analysis meetings. He would often sit with his feet up on a corner desk and turn swiftly to the office computer in order to jot down a comment in the document that outlined our developing themes. It seemed like he was permanently linked to these inanimate objects.]* Usually in these moments of uncertainty, I deferred to "the boss" replying "I don't know, what do you think?" This time was different. I felt this opportunity was too great to pass by and out popped, "I think we should change the focus of our study!" Mark agreed! For the first time—in what seemed like an awfully long time working with Mark on the "School Discipline" study—I felt like I had a say. I felt empowered; I felt like a 'real' researcher!

We both agreed that there was little merit in continuing the longitudinal "School Discipline" study, considering the strong possibility that the school was closing. The next hour or so seemed frantic as we calculated what would have to be done in order to transform the old study into the new. Recruiting students receiving special education services for the previous "School Discipline" study had been painful and I remember fearing Mark would have me begin recruitment all over again.

We decided to change the focus of the study but keep the recruited participants (whew!). We plotted how to maneuver through the IRB-approval process in order to start collecting data and drafted an entirely new IRB proposal, Mark diligently typing away, turning around every once in awhile to face me in his swivel chair asking for my opinion or a suggestion. I remember feeling exhilarated, thinking, "This is what it really

means to do qualitative research!" As Mark swiveled and typed, I envisioned myself out in the field, like Alex Kotlowitz uncovering the inequities of "our" urban youth. I could almost hear my heart beating wildly "Save our School!" as I fantasized about being with "my people" and fighting with them for their academic survival. We received IRB approval less than a week later for the project now dubbed "The Impact of a School Closing on Students Receiving Special Education Services and Their Families," and before I knew it, I was out in the field, tape recorder in hand, speaking with the people I had grown to know and care about.

Mark

When I heard the school was closing my first thought was, "Shit, months of work down the drain." Tenure pressures are pre-eminent for tenure-track faculty. We had spent a lot of time putting together the discipline study; Kelly had bent over backwards developing relationships with school personnel and recruiting students and now it looked like it was going to go sour. We sat in my office and talked and after about an hour it dawned on us that what we had to do was shift gears and study the closing process. It was, actually, a terrific research opportunity. I think our "discovery" stance, part and parcel of the grounded theory/qualitative research perspective, allowed this to happen, or even promoted it. Our research was not ruined. We could invite our participants to be part of a new project, one that was also compelling and that allowed us to continue our focus on organizational behavior and the lives and well-being of vulnerable students.

I think when we realized what we were going to do there was something like a moment of joy. We were happy in our research roles in that moment. I think we felt that we were responding to the realities and invitations of a compelling social situation and that we were acting, as researchers, responsively and

humanely. Is this what researchers feel, ever? Is this how they view themselves, ever? Probably, but you would never know it. Quantitative research reports feel like the work of robots, to me. Should researchers have feelings? How do they work in the research process? We were happy doing something called for in the moment, something responsible and worthwhile, and I think we were a little proud of ourselves, too…Can research be in the moment? Might it be better in some way when research projects are spawned by events? Has this been done before? Are immediacy/responsivity valuable in research? In knowledge building? Many other questions are raised for me by this experience. Should researchers be more "portable" in this way?

Experimental and Control Groups: Kelly

Henry, a senior faculty member, was the study advisor and joined us in a meeting to discuss our progress on the project. I enjoyed Henry's presence, specifically because we tended to share similar views on research that differed substantially from what, at times, felt like Mark's chaotic "emerging theory" approach. Henry also frequently complimented me for my diligence in the field, an added bonus for any beginning researcher. On many occasions Henry agreed with me about Mark's reluctance to get directly involved interviewing and his bewildering views on what was happening with these families. Henry and Mark often disputed their views on their very different epistemological positions. Mark appeared to be a pragmatic constructivist (note the contradiction), while Henry a post positivist. I found myself more comfortable with post-positivist views because they had been the foci for the majority of my research and evaluation courses. This led to some frequently heated debates where Henry questioned the merit of Mark's method. At this point in the meetings,

I would envision them as two male peacocks desperately spreading their plums in order to intimidate the other male: "Oh yeah well check out these feathers!" These two-hour meetings frequently felt unproductive considering I was the one who had to actually go out in the field to do the research, leaving the two peacocks behind to groom for their next "display."

During one philosophical wrestling match between Henry and Mark, I interjected an idea about transforming the project into a more deterministic study by incorporating a control group. My thought was to add a control group in order to compare the long-term effects of school discipline on non special-education students versus our participants who were receiving special-education services. At the time this option made sense (I learned this in school – this is what you are supposed to do as a researcher!) and it would finally add the clarity and solidity I so craved in this study. Henry agreed, both of us nodding our heads happily about the proposition. Mark quickly quelled our idea. He leaned back in his signature swivel chair, angrily shrugging off our suggestion, and re-established himself as Principal Investigator. With that and after nearly two hours of battling, Henry stood up, told Mark he should do what he wanted, and left the office. I watched feeling defeated as Henry walked out the door. Henry eventually left the project and I remained alone with Mark amidst the chaos.

Mark

So much for nobility and joy. What was this? Why were Kelly and Henry talking to me about setting up experimental and control groups? Doesn't anyone around here know anything about qualitative research? Doesn't anyone care about this stuff? Am I talking to the wall? I suppose the fact that this approach matches my personality and style and approach to the world (unstructured; challenging; empathic; inquisitive;

unconventional) that I simply fail to understand why others don't get it. I wanted Henry to participate because of his experience, wisdom, and interest in school-based research. But I knew Henry did not value qualitative research and I was unsure how it was going to play out. As we talked early on about the study, his opposition and exasperation with my sense of how to go about things were apparent and, at times, appalling to me. His mocking, teasing, and hostile challenges to my ideas, expressed in front of Kelly, saddened, angered, and confused me. I couldn't understand why he so harshly attacked me and my authority. I was surprised at Kelly, too. I thought she "got it." I wasn't sure what she was expressing. My sense was that the unstructured, spontaneous, and loosey-goosey nature of what we were doing had gotten to her, and she longed for something surer, more solid, more structured, more, perhaps, legitimate. Did she feel like this wasn't real or real enough? Was she scared about not knowing what she was doing? Was she scared that I didn't know what I was doing? Did I?

What does it mean to know what you are doing, in research? Does it mean knowing what others expect you to know? Which others? How much sense does this make? I remember a comment made to me at a conference by Terry Wolfer, a social worker and qualitative researcher, that one thing he had learned from doing his qualitative dissertation was that you had to make it up with each study you did. I often talk to my practice students about this, that good practice is created, that it is responsive in micromoments to lots of realities: the client's needs, problems, preferences, and what they are communicating in the moment; you; the agency; history; other things. Students struggle with this and lots of our colleagues don't buy this or want it. Structure. Evidence-based practice. Which equals, in my view, doing "what's right," and not what the complexities

and emotions and exigencies of the moment call for. Is this too difficult and frightening for us?

If it is in practice then obviously it must be in quantitative research, where control is king. I sat in this meeting, having thought that we (all of us - the "team") had dedicated ourselves to a grounded theory study, exasperated, and feeling like an outlaw. Or a dummy. I tried to explain what we had set out to do and to explore Kelly's concerns. Henry shook his head.

Henry, by the way, had a habit of turning on the overhead fluorescent lights in my office every time he walked in. I prefer lower lighting and lit the room with a few table lamps. But in these meetings, when he walked in, click, the lights went on and things got (for me) intolerably bright. But I deferred to Henry, a senior colleague, and his predilection for light.

It may have been in this moment that I knew I was in this alone. It wasn't going to work. I think it may have been in this moment that Kelly decided to jump ship, which she did. I'm stubborn, and I wasn't going over the side. No experimental groups. No control groups. Bye Henry. Bye Kelly. I will carry on. I guess. Somehow.

The paradox: Kelly, the biracial female, vexed by my liberal approach, demanding structure and the good old fashioned way of doing things. Mark, the old white guy, pushing her to see things more freely, to let go of some of the established frames that in this case offered little but an opportunity to do work that might allow us a better chance of being seen as "legitimate." Henry, the even older white guy with authority over me, appearing to her as her anchor and voice of reason. What was really important to her? What were her real ambitions here?

Henry left early—he always left after one hour. "Who makes meetings for more than an hour?" He couldn't understand my predilection for three hour research meetings. I liked to get into it. [Maybe he didn't? Was

this the problem?] After a little more discussion Kelly left. I sat there, alone, in Henry's light.

The Data Analysis Meeting: Kelly

I cannot stand data analysis meetings! I sit in Mark's office where, for nearly four hours, I have to watch him rotate around in his chair interpreting what the study participants meant by a word, phrase, and/or sentence in one of my interviews and record it in his computer. It was very trying because many times we did not agree and despite my contact and involvement with the family, my views were often trumped by his. In one heated argument we had over a statement, paragraph, sentence, or possibly a word (I cannot remember exactly what) I remember feeling like my head was going to explode. This particular transcript was of a married mother of two whose home I had recently visited in order to conduct the interview. I felt particularly loyal to this parent having been welcomed to the home twice for over-two-hour interviews. This mother was also a grandmother who along with her husband raises a son, a daughter, and a granddaughter in their home. Ms. Williams (as I will call her) is a very kind and supportive individual. She was happy to meet with me in her home and expressed appreciation for it since she would have had difficulty traveling because of a bad hip. We discussed for what seemed like hours, her negative experiences attending a school down south, and her hopes that her children would overcome their learning deficits and attend college. All the while Ms. Williams' granddaughter, Tonya, curiously inspected the tape recorder and adorably competed with it for our attention by repeatedly running into the room to say hello. Ms. Williams lived on the second floor of a two-family home and her mother lived below her. During my second interview, Ms. Williams introduced me as a friend from her son's school to her mother. I felt honored. [Sadly, Ms. Williams would later

refuse to speak with any of the other research assistants when I left the project. When I attempted to reassure her on the telephone, she politely said she felt comfortable with me and was not interested in sharing information with anyone new.]

During this particular data analysis meeting, Mark was reviewing Ms. Williams' transcript and came across some words that, for some reason or another, stood out for him. These words began to transform into an idea which had him swiveling in his chair to add this "code" to his computer. His idea was that parents, this one in particular, seemed detached from their children and, because of this, had unrealistic expectations for their future. I quickly stiffened in my chair feeling the blood rush to my head (this was often a visible sign that Mark had triggered a button with me). I pictured the home I had just sat in, the photographs of the children framed on the walls, even little Tonya smiling up at me. I calmly voiced my disagreement, and Mark challenged me. I restated my point, emphasizing my experiences with the family in the home and describing how I thought his interpretations were misplaced. Mark challenged me again demanding evidence. (My most frustrating experiences with Mark revolved around these words. Why were my individual observations and experiences with these families not evidence enough? What kind of evidence is this man looking for? I felt like he needed me to be forensic scientist diligently swabbing under a participant's finger nail to provide him with 'real' proof. Do not my observations and experiences with the family count for anything?) I got very angry and argued against the injustice he was inflicting. Mark shouted back, "Where's your humility?"

I kept thinking, "Kelly you're out of line," yet I really could not respect this person swiveling before me in the glow of his computer light. I had to stand up for these families and students and, in a way, a piece of

myself who has always wished I could have been more attached and connected to my African American heritage. I felt used and abused in the meetings constantly taking personal offense to what I thought were very racist statements and misperceptions. I had to often "stand up" for what I knew were good people because Mark characterized them as unloving, aloof parents. How often had I heard these opinions from white people who surrounded me all of my life? How many times had I not said anything, but wanted to? How many racist jokes had I heard by white people who felt I was "different" from the typical Black person who was the subject of their jokes? And here I was again in this very uncomfortable situation with what seemed like yet another "typical" white person condemning "those people" for not caring about their children and preferring to take the "easy" route of living off welfare. "They are to blame for their misfortune!" Isn't this the Moynihan report or the "welfare queen" belief reincarnated? Is not this the process of how "researchers" in the past spread horrible misperceptions that were quickly indoctrinated into American society? Are we not as social workers responsible for combating racism and putting these myths to rest? Yet here I am in a Ph.D. social work program across from a person who would prefer to blame the individual and continue to perpetuate the stereotypes that Blacks are "bad people."

I did not agree and could not help but speak up, even if it was disrespectful! This is MY work and to see it twisted and turned like this and recorded in his computer was way too painful. I remember sitting in these people's homes, listening attentively to their stories of misfortune and disadvantage, observing the toll poverty took on their lives and the lives of their children, and yet I, the stranger/researcher was still welcome in their homes and offered conversation. I watched the look on their faces when someone seemed interested in them—I saw what it did, I felt for them and relished in their many strengths. I am not stupid; I realize some of the parents we interviewed had limitations. The one parent that comes to mind herself appeared to have a substantial disability. She had difficulty reading words on our consent form and staying focused during interviews. I had met her at school where she had come to attend a school conference with the vice principal. She was very pleasant and open to speaking with me. As I sat in another infamous data analysis session with Mark and she became the target of critical debate of her abilities as a parent, I remember thinking, "Please don't play the race card on this one; the poor women is mentally disabled and probably has difficulty taking care of herself." Besides, despite her disabilities this woman worked a job and was raising two teenagers, yet I met her at school where she had made time for a meeting.

Many of the disagreements between Mark and me had a lot to do with my own personal beliefs and professional values as a social work clinician. As a therapist, I tend to look at individuals through an ecological lens, examining the circumstances, situations, and events that may or may not influence a client's well-being. For this reason I often find it very difficult to ignore the realities shaped by "isms" (racism, sexism, ageism, etc.). This makes it nearly impossible for me to blame the individual. I embraced the strengths perspective in my work with clients. I often felt this process of reflection was one sided. My passionate and very personal interpretations were not allowed in the data analysis process despite the merit of reflexivity in qualitative research. I was constantly called under the carpet for "being too concerned and connected" to these families to have an "objective" opinion.

But what about the PI himself? Had he mastered the ability to put his personal values and beliefs on the backburner while reading a transcript and recreating the circumstances

from which it occurred? Can anyone really do this? His tendency to blame and point fingers seemed highly subjective for someone who had not spent one minute in an interview with a student or family member. I understand it is important to have someone who is outside of the interview process to assist in the interpretations of the data, but is it appropriate and responsible for the PI to be completely absent from the field yet have full reign over the conclusions that are drawn? Was I alone in this experience? Had other research assistants disagreed with their PIs over interpretation, or is this phenomenon just not talked about?

Mark

I love data analysis meetings. I love their literary quality, the study of words and their meanings. I love getting at what people are thinking and feeling and experiencing, at least to the extent that you can reading their (transcribed) words on a piece of paper. I like the twists and turns of thought and the supposition and wonderings that are a part of reading these testimonies as part of a team of people who are curious and wanting to learn something that is important and that can be shared with others. I also love the arguments. I like when I think this and you think that and then we have it out. I like the challenge, the thinking, the need to bare to another the quality and power of what you believe and then the need to defend it against principled, careful, thoughtful, crazy, stupid, emotional, worthless attack. It is good and it is good fun and my belief is that this can lead to truest truths about things, or, at least, really really good questions that can be asked next time. I like all this.

However, this makes other people crazy, and angry with me. I have run seven or so qualitative research studies in the past four years and in each case the research assistants have at one time or another become absolutely enraged with me. I am sexist, says one. I am racist, says another. I ask too much.

I am disorganized. I am sitting contentedly in my office while they are in the field ACTUALLY DOING THE WORK. Why do I get to say what it all means? Because I have the degree? Because I know what I am doing and they do not? Because I am white? Because I am male? Because I am a pain in the ass and demand compliance? Or is it because I believe in what we are doing, in its goodness and promise, and because I feel a great and persistent need to fend off forces that seem to be designed to make it less vital, less true, and less idiosyncratic? Who knows?

Kelly and I had an awful time talking about the mother of one of our students. The mother struggled. She wasn't clear what school her son attended. he didn't understand many of our questions and seemed at times to be telling Kelly things to please her. I was taken aback by this. Other mothers also "struggled"; I am still not entirely sure how to describe this with respect and sensitivity, given Kelly's upset with me. It occurred to me that these mothers had vast limitations in terms of how well they could support their children's schooling and how well they could partner with teachers and advocate when they needed to. This seemed like an important finding in this study. I believed that what was important was that the school seemed to fail to appreciate the needs and challenges of these moms and that that would be important to say. Kelly thought that I was hateful. I didn't know how to talk to her about this in a way that convinced her otherwise.

I am not a proponent of the "strengths perspective." I loathe sloppy euphemism and fuzzy thinking gussied up to please a constituency, especially if it obscures truths. Social work *is* a strengths perspective. Social work research should not capitulate to the sentimentalities and the I-dare-you-to-contradict-me ideologies that hurt and that angry people demand in place of facts. This unfortunate crusade works, in my view, with some social work educators and CSWE, and

we need to speak much more candidly/ bravely about the problems this is causing. But knowledge production should be as free of this as possible. That's the point, entirely, of the grounded theory approach: to escape imposed frameworks that disable and skew the discovery of what is real, complex, and lived, not theorized.

The Split: Kelly

I just can't do it! I have to step back from this project. It has become too personal and my disrespect for the PI is beyond obvious. I have to give up my attachment to this project in order to regain my sanity. I do not feel I want to be associated with a study looking to uncover yet another theory on how bad Black people are. (Shit! All anyone has to do is watch the news!) Is not this project about the unfortunate events of the school closing? I really would prefer to not be involved, though it kills me to give up that control – connection with families, all the hard work of recruiting, etc. It is too painful to watch all my efforts be torn apart by what seems to me to be yet another disconnected white guy who would prefer to stay in his Ivory Tower and point fingers from the turret at the undeserving poor. I do not have it in me—God help the other research assistants—who ever they are— Lord knows they come and go—why do I remain anyway? (Approximately six research assistants came and went during the course of our study, constantly threatening the project's stability and, particularly, the comfort level of our participants. Each time a new researcher came aboard, and in spite of my distance from the project, I had to write an introductory letter to families and personally call them to tell them about the new contact person.)

I eventually stopped coming to data analysis meetings. At first, I told Mark I needed to step back from analysis. He agreed and allowed me to leave research meetings before analysis. Eventually I found myself again an observer of Mark's interpretive process and felt disengaged. I realized my opinions ultimately did not matter. I recall one of the final meetings with Henry when Mark asserted himself as PI, leaving Henry for the most part displaced. I no longer saw the benefits of doing this kind of research. I could not see how our study could help our families and students or social workers. I no longer saw the purpose. It was time to leave.

Mark

Kelly abandoned the study to work on a diversity project with a female, Native American faculty member at the school. I thought this was perfect: she runs from a study of kids who are mistreated by design in schools, kids of color and their families, who are victimized by institutional insensitivity and racism to help someone set up a cabinet of videos on oppression. Fine. (The study continued with a succession of research assistants, a few of them, mostly overworked master's students, came and left as well.) Kelly went to a safe place. It is probably true that I climb out on limbs that most wouldn't want their cats on. But I don't understand the retreat of people whose lives speak to them of the necessity of risk-taking and convention-breaking, and I don't understand the allure of the conservative. Things have been turned on their head: faculty are making careers for themselves and fabulous livings doing "diversity training." It's become an industry. Has it served us well? Where are the politics in this approach? Does it have anything to say about power in ways that help us to change problems of power and disempowerment? Or has it become a feel-good exercise for us? Is all of this changing lives, changing conditions of life for the oppressed? Or is it another way for US to feel in control? For US to feel empowered? Why is this study (of some of those lives) less important than a video cabinet?

Temporarily Coming Together: Kelly

Why is this so difficult? Is this really how qualitative research works and is this really the method for me? All these questions kept coming up to the point when I began to feel it would be better in the future to do quantitative research and avoid these highly agitating experiences. Instead I took an advanced qualitative research course focusing on Grounded Theory in a different department at the University. I was motivated to take this course to "prove Mark" and his disorganized approach wrong. In the class, I was able to see a different perspective of qualitative research and embrace the rigor that ultimately supports the method. I learned that there are different ways to do qualitative research and I found what seems to be a better process. Although I do not think the researcher should avoid interviewing subjects entirely, I do feel it is important to have a peer who is unassociated with the study to review tentative conclusions as a form of triangulation. I have also learned how to incorporate more organization into the process by using qualitative software and memo notes. I felt informed and was excited to once again experience the green grass of qualitative research.

I received an e-mail from Mark after about a year of being away from direct involvement in this research project (from time to time I would receive e-mails from his research assistants requesting participant contact information or from Mark requesting numbers of recruits—which always made me feel connected to the project and the most well-informed assistant) asking if I would be interested in co-presenting with him at an upcoming presentation by a center at the University that was involved in funding parts of the study. The e-mail initially triggered feelings of apprehension considering some of our past heated debates and the inability in our working relationship to agree on several key findings in transcript interpretation and data analysis meetings. I admit the pull to re-involve myself with Mark was not very strong and my initial e-mail draft was a polite "no thank you." However, as I looked over the e-mail, I realized the offer would provide a two-fold benefit; the presentation would be something useful to put on my CV (something every doctoral student wants), but the opportunity to add my "slant" to the overall themes of the project and once again "advocate" for the disengaged families. This made reengagement irresistible. Subsequently, Mark contacted me to discuss the presentation and form a draft outline of the presentation. As I walked into the office, I felt a bit nervous considering some of the many "battles" that had taken place in that room. I focused on the other chairs in the office, thinking about how many different research assistants had occupied those seats. Mark was characteristically sitting in his swivel chair. Why was I doing this to myself again? Could I really expect to influence the "voices" that emerged from his computer?

Mark

I called this our rapprochement. I said this word to Kelly and then felt a little funny about saying it with a slight/lousy French accent. It just seemed truer to say it that way but I told Kelly that I was concerned that I would seem arrogant using a French accent. It just seemed like an apt way of describing our reunion to present this work and to write this paper. Even in the reading of the (I think) unfair characterizations that Kelly has written here, I am immensely pleased. We are now working together on something good and important and we agree that it is good and important and that perhaps telling our stories might somehow help other researchers struggling to understand the boundaries and wall-less and unechoing vastness of uncertainty in so many moments of qualitative inquiry. I love her honesty. I love (mostly) the

sting that it produces in me. However, it remains to be seen if this rapprochement is real and stands for something, or if it is a way for her and for me to go on record about what happened (to get a publication out of this fiasco) and to say something like "it wasn't my fault."

"Writing Up" This Narrative: Kelly

In order to accurately portray my experiences on paper, I needed to revisit very powerful memories. This was a very arduous process for me as I attempted to regurgitate the past. Many of the memorable thoughts and feelings I have are of the students and families I interviewed and observed during my involvement with the project. The majority of the students who lived in poverty were of African American descent, and had various learning deficits. They had, unfortunately, for one reason or another, ended up at a school that many "outsiders" considered a breeding ground for future criminals and illiterates. This was a harsh and difficult reality for any researcher to ingest. It became particularly hard for me because I connected to the participants with whom I shared a cultural heritage and with whom I had worked as a social worker in a local child and family service agency. I remember often feeling overwhelmed by the inequities these students and their families faced on a regular basis. Here I was observing them like a zoo attendee until my "shift" was up and I headed home back to white suburbia. Yet I was told this was very important information to capture (really?).

I kept thinking, "Wouldn't my time be better off spent working as a volunteer social worker in the school linking students to different after-school programs or helping families understand their rights within the IDEA laws?" Was that not my ethical duty as a social worker to help people? Isn't that the purpose of conducting research in the field of social work? I remember really wanting to help students and families in any way possible to perhaps change even a small area of their lives in a positive way. One student, for example, would occasionally show up at the research office (a space the school administrators gave us to house our computer and interview paraphernalia) "just to talk" to me. It was obvious this student had some serious concerns, having told me about his gang involvement and conflicts with peers in school. Browdy (as I will call him) was a very social 15 year old who often "annoyed" teachers by missing class and performing poorly on school exams. Browdy also had a medical condition that caused him to have to go to the bathroom frequently throughout the school day. His mother told me in an interview that Browdy had come home from school one day with wet pants. Supposedly one of Browdy's "annoyed" teachers refused to let him go to the bathroom. His mother looked tired, having just returned from a graveyard shift at a nursing home; she was even more tired of dealing with unsympathetic teachers and administrators at her son's school. Listening to stories such as this made me question my role as a researcher. I felt uncomfortable just uncovering the injustices that were continuously affecting our six students and their families. As I sat in data analysis meetings, the idea that these families were living this unfortunate reality haunted me and subsequently affected how I would interpret their words and draw conclusions about their lives.

It's a Thursday night and I am typing away at my laptop recalling my experiences on the "School Closing" project. In the background, the local news mentions that Trend High School's doors will reopen for students from another, more prominent public city school in the fall of 2006. The students will be "housed" at Trend High until renovations are completed at their former school. I wonder what effect this will have on our students who in a sense were kicked out

of their building only to be replaced by more privileged students who are using the school like a hotel. I am immediately drawn back into the study and the lives of our students and families. I wonder if we did them an injustice by just studying them. I wonder if spreading the word about our study will in some way help, even in an indirect way, similar students and families who may be faced with the closing of their own neighborhood school. Is this not what every researcher hopes? I think we can make a difference and in realizing that I feel compelled to stay the course with Mark and our grounded theory study - for better or for worse.

Mark

We (I?) will get back to analyzing the data, which had to be put on hold for a while. The study will describe, primarily, the ways in which this school failed to keep its promises to work as partners to these students and their parents in support of their transitions to new schools and other opportunities. It will be about the ways in which the school made promises that it knew it could not keep and then systematically did things the ways that most organizations do things: it did what it usually did, primarily, things that had been done before; things that were comfortable; things that involved (generally) less rather than more work; things that involved little communication and power sharing; but also, things that to other people would look like reasonable practices. It will be about how organizations like this school are faced with complex and, arguably, impossible tasks that are both unachievable and undiscussable (see Argryis, 1990). In these situations, people have to manage their work and their energy and their stress by doing "good" practice that they know (at least subconsciously) will fail. That, I think, is what the study will say.

I think there is something about us and our experience together that parallels this. I think that Kelly and Henry wanted

"reasonableness" in our work together. Kelly wanted fairness and kindness and compassion and a story that was less disturbing. She wanted me to agree with her sentiments and her advocacy position and her longing for structure and her need to see rainbows and to help. Henry wanted me to listen to him (to reason) and agree with him and do what he did: learn from one of the BIG SCHOOLS how research is done and do it that way. He wanted me to be less creative than I was and he wanted me to be as unwilling to take risks as he was. He wanted me to be in the field. (I could not be in the field though I agree that that is optimal. I had taken on too much and could not; also, though, I had learned by being thrown into the field and this responsibility helped me in ways that I thought would also benefit Kelly.) Henry also was disappointed that I wasn't more interested in finding out what the school personnel and students and families wanted to learn. He wanted me to have them to co-design the research with me. I believe, participants in my studies design the research with their words, their questions, their relationships with the people to whom they are telling their stories. Each study is unique. During each study the process of "doing" research creates, in my experience, many, many unique moments which then invariably change the following moments and the studies in which they occur, indelibly. This, to me, helps to get at truths. It is this openness that allowed us to go from study 1 to study 2 and to capture some important, perhaps even profound, things. Study participants did help design this study, but in a way that Henry did not favor, or perhaps, understand.

My research is important to me. I want to do it the best I can, which to me means carefully designing and modifying as I go to position myself for maximum and "truthful" discovery. My best work is intensely personal and creative and not (much or often) like others' work. It is unique. But it was not how Kelly or Henry would have done it. I

think to them it didn't much feel like other things they had done or wanted to do or, ultimately, how research "should" be done. They didn't understand what I thought was important nor did they believe in me. They did not want to follow me. So they left.

"Writing Up" This Narrative: A Coda - Mark

One of the reviewers of this article asked us to address certain aspects of our team experience here in a final section. Among other points, the reviewer asked that we discuss the impact of "power differentials" and "non-democratic teams."

What were the power differentials among the three of us? Henry was tenured. Henry voted on my tenure. I was an untenured faculty member; I had no formal nor any meaningful informal means of influencing Henry's career (or views, apparently.) Kelly was a student. In my role on this project, I was not Kelly's teacher (I could not grade her), and I was not her boss (I did not pay her). I knew the most about qualitative research (I was often—not always—in the best position to judge what made sense to do.)

Ultimately, did my knowledge make me the most powerful? Henry remains a tenured full professor. Kelly is a doctoral candidate who performed well in her courses, is teaching in the master's program, is well thought of, and now has a first authorship publication. She will likely be applauded by readers of this piece for giving voice to important concerns in the face of an oppressive other. She continues her work with other faculty. Her future seems bright.

I was told in my most recent faculty review (a process in which Henry participated) that I was "untenurable" due to my "pattern" (not "numbers") of scholarship. This refers to fewer publications during data collection and then more as data are analyzed and manuscripts are written, a flow type that I would think to be unavoidable for most beginning qualitative

researchers (do other untenured, qualitative researchers also have "pattern" problems in their review processes?) I had to leave.

Who had the power?

On "non-democratic teams": the editors' reading of this piece persuaded them that this was an apt characterization of our team. I don't think a qualitative research team can be anything other than democratic. Qualitative data analytic teamwork in some ways is and must be ultimately democratic, actually. At least in a grounded theory approach (see Strauss & Corbin, 1998), the (very) free flow of ideas, feelings, tangents, biases, conceptions, and misconceptions shared with analytic partners, then carefully examined and tested against data, theory, and knowledge constitute the heart of the analytic exercise. This is democracy at its best, in a way: all can have a say, and must, really, to achieve deepest understandings of what is being studied. In my view Kelly was a full participant and partner in this, and her input in data analysis was profoundly important and, I would argue, honored. While we argued over, for example, how to best characterize the mother who struggled to remember what school her son attended, Kelly's poignant and compassionate pleas that we not be disrespectful to her were critical in shaping our best and fairest portrait of this woman and her life. But I did not simply agree with Kelly because she was being nice; I challenged virtually every assertion so that we could substantiate our views and build together the truest stories of these people and this school. Honoring someone's opinions does not mean the kind of polite, unquestioning capitulation that seems to be what Kelly and others sometimes seem to be after. To me, democracy is not about groupthink/Candide-like optimism; it is about a group's capacity to consider matters of importance to all of its members fully, complexly, and honestly, and to share those

considerations openly with one another without fear of coercion. I thought that we had achieved this.

But this kind of democracy is not what some prefer. Is it possible that there is a new democracy, in which the views that ostensibly are intended to honor and protect those deemed at risk may not under any circumstances be challenged, or even examined? Is this what we have (unfortunately, perversely) achieved with our diversity curriculum? And what democracy exists within the university tenure system? Were my questioning style and unconventional points of view what drove Henry away and motivated my review committee to reject (eject) me? If the point is to do things as everyone else does them, what will we ever challenge? If that is true then what is social work? Have we really become this conservative? If I am threatening to both Kelly and Henry, then what is it that I am threatening? Who was coercing whom?

And to you, the reader, please allow me to ask: When was the last time *you* actively encouraged someone under your supervision to criticize you this directly, this vehemently, this publicly, this recklessly? (If you haven't, why haven't you?) Do you think that this publication (Jackson, Cameron, & Staller, 2006) is likely the product of a "non-democratic team?" You, the reader, must decide for yourself. Who here was the good? The bad? The ugly?

Kelly

During my days on the project, interchanges between Mark and me, especially during data analysis sessions, often left me feeling affronted. It was my experience that my interpretive positions were often challenged and my values and beliefs about the participants regularly assaulted whether grounded in the data or not. Though Mark may have a differing opinion about the interplay of power in our research relationship, serving

as his research assistant and enduring his unconcealed discrediting of my interpretations **was** a very devaluing experience. This contributed to my exiting the project (two semesters after my official year-long research assistantship ended).

I continue to struggle with Mark over our very different beliefs and values, and unfortunately the dynamics of power that afflicted our research relationship before were repeated again in writing this manuscript. Old lines of power were redrawn and feelings of disempowerment reestablished, inevitably producing even more conflict. My desire to leave was reignited. I am hopeful that being reminded of my feelings of disempowerment instigated by these very familiar dynamics have led me to tell a more accurate story of what happened. In writing this piece, it was also my hope that the harbored frustration could have been resolved between the two of us, or we could have at least moved from a less angry place to one where we 'agree to disagree', but as Mark said to me in a recent telephone conversation – "Sometimes there are no Hollywood endings."

Food for thought: This is a controversial issue that some readers may shrug off as attributable to my inexperience, complications of counter-transference, or miscommunication between researchers. Nonetheless the question still remains: why is it not talked about in the literature? We social workers are constantly walking on thin ice in our attempts to protect clients' well-being, and in this case our research participants. Yet we are naive to the fact that controversies and ethical issues arise within research teams on qualitative projects. Do we not have different backgrounds, beliefs, values? We are taught as Master's level students to discuss and reflect on our personal triggers in preparation for working with certain clients in a clinical setting. I believe it is just as important for us to learn that these tools are also necessary in research. We must be constantly in touch with

ourselves and keep not only our clients safe, but ourselves as well, from the very strenuous and challenging aspects of qualitative research.

A Closing Note from Karen

At the time I got called upon to intervene in this writing project—or perhaps to intervene in the relationship between "research team" members Mark and Kelly— they were trading barbs through penned paragraphs. For me these two projects, writing and relationship mending, melded during collaboration. The net result was a smoothed out, toned down version of their original manuscript. When the editor called for minor revisions because that work was "missing a final section" and asked "now that the relationship is either over or redefined how do people feel?" I thought it would be easy to finish off. I was wrong. I witnessed first hand the explosive and dynamic nature of the relationship between Mark and Kelly. The resolve that I thought was cleanly negotiated as a product of the first manuscript draft turned out to be nothing more than a temporary truce.

Let me briefly explain my relationships with Mark and Kelly and my role in the project. Mark is an old friend from our doctoral student days. I have great respect for Mark yet am also familiar with his challenging style of engagement. We are now in faculty positions at different universities. I had not met his student, Kelly, but I quickly identified with her position. In our most recent conversation, we all acknowledged I was brought on board in order to level the playing field between Mark and Kelly. I hope I have served them both, while always openly acknowledging my long-term friendship with Mark and my inclination to align my sympathies and arguments with Kelly. Now, at the risk of alienating both friends, old and new, I step back and try to articulate the great gulf I see between them and its relationship

to their research and writing projects. I had not anticipated taking on this role in public. In my view, it would have been better if they had written their "lessons learned" together. However, it was clear, given how personally and emotionally involved each one was, that synthesizing their experiences as a third party was virtually impossible. Of course, I can only give you my outsider interpretations of where I see the fault lines.

Power. Kelly saw Mark as "in power" given where he sat relative to her. Included on the list of factors that put him in power was his gender, his race, his university faculty position, and his role as PI on the research project. Certainly this is how most of us have been trained to understand the notion of power. Mark, in turn, reminds us that power is relative. He was conducting research from a setting that had its own power dynamics. He was powerless in a tenure decision that changed his life and disrupted his research but had little to no effect on Kelly or Henry. He was upset (and maybe even a little threatened) when Kelly employed Henry's help in siding against him. So I'm left wondering about the activity of parsing out power relations into bite-sized pieces for analysis. When must you step outside the "research team" dyad and consider broader contexts? Power dynamics are neither simple nor unidirectional. Perhaps to better understand their workings in a research project we must look at both local interactions between members as well as the institutional, political, and social settings in which those interactions are taking place.

Democracy. Mark believes that their data analysis sessions were democratic. Kelly does not. It is a deep-seated disagreement. Democracy, Mark argued is achieved when we "all can have a say" and he reports Kelly was a "full participant and partner." Kelly didn't feel like a "partner;" she felt like an "assistant" or a "student." Mark believes democracy doesn't mean "unquestioning

capitulation" to another person's views. Kelly believes that Mark, by virtue of his PI role and faculty status, simply had the final word regarding interpretation, thus defying the very notion of "democracy."

Of interest here are contested notions of democracy in a research team. Mark believes that democracy is achieved when all parties voluntarily and vigorously participate. After all it isn't every faculty member who would invite a doctoral student fully into the debate. At the risk of putting words in Kelly's mouth, she believes democracy is achieved when a minority voice is heard in the final outcome. Students of democratic theory will recognize a classic line of argument from the voting-rights literature here. Should success be measured by equal access to the polling place, or should it be measured in terms of political outcomes? Gerrymandering can undermine democratic outcomes even while presenting a facade of equal access. Returning to a research context, which form of democracy is better? While there is scholarly debate about the extent to which to honor interpretations offered by research *subjects* in qualitative inquiry, to the best of my knowledge there isn't an analogous discussion about what to do with differing voices within research teams. It is an important topic because the very essence of the "results" reported depend upon it.

Conflict . It became clear as Mark and Kelly argued over the final sections of this manuscript that they have diametrically opposed views on the role of "conflict." Mark sees difference as an invigorating and stimulating part of the creative research process. He loves heated debate. Mark can engage in passionate discussion and, at the end of the day, still be your friend. He can be hurt in the process but he promises to get over it. Kelly and I, frankly, are not so readily comfortable with this kind of conflict in this kind of context. It is possible to experience it not as a creative force but as a destructive

one that eats away at relationships, rapport, and trust. This is particularly true if meaningful reconciliation can't be achieved –or what Kelly calls "agreeing to disagree"—in its aftermath. Unresolved conflict can morph into anger. There seems to be a fine line between having open, honest communication on the one hand, and hurtful, mean spirited, bickering on the other. Mark and Kelly fundamentally disagree on the relative nature, force, and usefulness of conflict in the research endeavor.

Racism. Throughout these discussions there has been intense disagreement about the role of race, the notion of racism, and the label of racist. Mark is tired of being labeled an oppressor by virtue of his gender and race, by society in general, and by Kelly in particular. He sees this as a perverse, but perhaps inevitable, consequence of uncritical acceptance of the diversity movement. He endures being labeled by others because there is no alternative, but denies the allegations are accurate and would like explicit empirical evidence from those making them. I believe he might say his more nuanced and critical position in this regard offers him an excellent vantage point for understanding the people he studies. This angers Kelly, who feels that you need to have stood in the shoes of those who are oppressed to fully understand its nature. You must walk inside the homes of "her people" and bear witness first hand, in order to disentangle one form of disadvantage from another. It was her experiential knowledge, among other things, that she offered to the research project, and she believed that this insider knowledge and insight ought to have been better respected during data analysis sessions.

It is too bad to leave such provocative issues on the table and unresolved. There are no Hollywood endings, nor will simplistic answers suffice. In the end both Kelly and Mark might just agree on this.

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