

# *The Qualitative Methods Workbook*

*written by*

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## Part One:

# Introduction and Phenomenological Description

## 1 Introduction

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Sultan would scratch his head slowly, otherwise moving nothing but his eyes or perhaps his head, while he surveyed the situation about him in the most careful manner. (Koffka, 1924, p. 221, reviewing Kohler's studies of chimpanzees.)

Chimps solving problems – not by trial and error, but by looking and thinking – led Kohler and his fellow Gestalt psychologists to introduce the idea of insight. Insight is, roughly, the recognition of connections or patterns. His mind on the "unreachable" fruit, Sultan suddenly saw boxes and sticks as something more: tools, means to an end. It is as if the laws of conservation of matter and energy were suddenly overturned. A new reality comes into being, not with a "big bang," but with a small alteration of an ape's perspective!

As a kid, I loved looking at the Gestalt psychologists' figure-ground illustrations and reading their descriptions of problem-solving, whether by chimps or human beings; I loved reading the ethologists' descriptions of fish and gull and goose behaviors; the anthropologists' descriptions of exotic cultures; William James' discussions of will or consciousness.... Each gave me insight, a new perspective on the world, on myself. I felt myself "expanding!"

Then I went to college to study psychology in earnest, and I read "real" research. I remember sifting through the dry statistics of modern journals and wondering where the excitement had gone. I wondered as well about the individuals that went into the mean; about the way they felt in those bizarre experimental situations; whether Chinese people would behave the same; about the people who did the opposite of everyone else, but were now dismissed as "error." Instead of insight I got confusion.

But people are getting interested in the methods that produce insights again. And that is the reason for this workbook: to reintroduce the methods used by Gestalt psychologists and ethologists and anthropologists and people like William James.

Of course, to become proficient at these methods requires much more than this workbook can offer. The student must become familiar with the best works of others and gain first-hand experience at full-scale projects. I do hope, however, that students will be reminded of the excitement their own insights brought them and take it from there!

## Searching for a Definition

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The most common question I am asked by students considering taking my course is "what are qualitative methods?" Unfortunately, that's a hard one to answer.

I could start by telling you who uses them: philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, students of literature, historians, biologists...anyone, in fact, who finds the methods of the physical sciences somehow inappropriate for understanding human (and, occasionally, even animal) realities.

But perhaps the best way to get at a definition is to look at why these people have turned to qualitative methods:

1. For some, the manipulation most experimental studies require at least verges on the unethical. Whereas a chemical substance, a subatomic particle, or perhaps a white rat has no cause to object to being manipulated, human beings certainly may. To frighten them, persuade them of something, expose them to various conditions, etc., even in the name of science, may undermine their self-

- respect, their psychological integrity, their sense of self-determination, or even their physical health.
2. For others, it is the reliance on measurement that is disturbing. While reducing everything to numbers may be justified in the physical sciences, doing the same to human experience seems to dismiss the other, non-quantitative dimensions of that experience. How do you quantify meaning, for example, or love, or anger, or confusion? You can describe the Grand Canyon using only numbers – but somehow that wouldn't capture the essence of it!
  3. For still others, the issue is control. In order to find the relationship between two variables, all others must be controlled, whether by a reduction of actual variety, or by the establishment of control groups, or by statistically factoring out other variables. But how do you control the lifetime of experiences that a person brings to an experiment? What is the significance of a causal relation that does not occur independently outside the laboratory? And do results established by examining group tendencies then apply to individuals. Control is problematic in complex physical systems; imagine the problem with human beings.
  4. Others are disturbed by the tendency to reductionism. In the process of manipulating, measuring, and controlling variables, it is a matter of practicality to go down a level-of-analysis. Hence the predominance of physiological and information-processing explanations for human behavior. But, by their nature, these explanations avoid the very problems they were originally intended to explain – e.g. consciousness, meaning, personality, self, etc.
  5. One more problem is that the experimental method and related methods are intrinsically deterministic. What, in fact, would be the point of establishing causal relations if these relations could not be relied on? On the other hand, many people involved in the human sciences are interested in things that assume at least some degree of freedom. Morality, for example, has little meaning if people are as determined as falling bricks. What are we to do with concepts such as bravery, responsibility, generosity, honesty, or compassion (or, for that matter, evil, guilt, cowardice...) if these are not a matter of choice?

Generally, what disturbs so many people about traditional approaches in the human sciences is that they don't capture life as it is lived. And that, perhaps, is the closest we'll get to an essence of qualitative methods: They are methods that at least attempt to capture life as it is lived.

## Varieties of Qualitative Methods

Like more traditional methods, however, qualitative methods come in many varieties. For example, different researchers focus on different sources of data:

1. One's own immediate experience;
2. Others' experiences, which I might seek to understand through...
  - a. their speaking or writing,
  - b. their other behaviors,
  - c. their other products – technology, artwork, footprints, etc.

Another source of variation concerns how one collects one's data. There are three broad orientations:

1. a "past" orientation – collecting things that are the results of past living, like artifacts or literature;
2. a "present" orientation – observing (or introspecting) what is happening now;
3. a "future" orientation – eliciting your data, making it happen, as in an interview or a project.

And there are different ways of handling that data, of analyzing it. I like to contrast between...

1. "cool" analysis, technical, like structural analysis or the repertory grid, and
2. "warm" analysis, wherein empathy is integral to the analysis, such as in phenomenology or hermeneutics.

The variations will become clear as we look at them. So let's get to it!

My thanks to Chris Zeigler, Betty Anderson, and Donna Seltzer for allowing me to use examples of their work. And thanks to all my Qualitative Methods students over the years for their contributions to the development of this workbook and the course itself!

## 2 Phenomenological Description

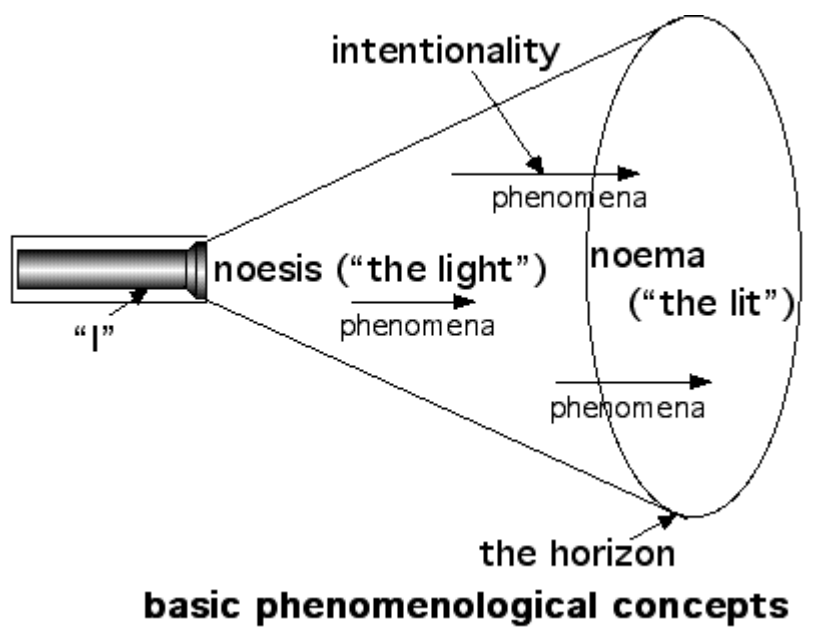
Traditional methods – e.g. experimentation – begin long before they seem to: You derive a hypothesis from your favorite theory and expect it to hold up; you define your variables operationally, i.e. in terms of what you intend to manipulate and measure; you control other variables, either physically in the lab, or statistically with a nice big "n"; you choose a statistical device to decide the significance of the results for you.... It's sort of like declaring war on your topic!

This is in contrast to phenomenology, which instructs us to allow the phenomenon to reveal itself in its fullness. You "look" at it from all perspectives, using all your senses, even attending to your thoughts and feelings. Phenomenologists say that phenomena are apodictic, which means the "speak for themselves" – which means in turn that we should be prepared to listen!

### Intentionality

We do this by (1) understanding intentionality and (2) practicing bracketing. First, intentionality: In phenomenology, we say "all consciousness is consciousness of.... Don Ihde explains: "Every experiencing has its reference or direction toward what is experienced and, contrarily, every experienced phenomenon refers to or reflects a mode of experiencing to which it is present." (1986, pp. 42-43.)

What it means is that all experiences have both an objective and a subjective component, and so understanding a phenomenon means understanding both. The objective "pole" of a phenomenon is called the intended object or noema (plural: noemata, adjective: noematic) and the subjective "pole" of a phenomenon is called the intending act or noesis (plural: noeses, adjective: noetic):



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Intending acts might include seeing, hearing, feeling, thinking, judging... and intended objects the sights seen, the words heard, the feeling felt, the thoughts thought, the ideas judged, and so on. Note that intended objects include not only objects in the traditional sense, but also such slippery little devils as feelings, thoughts, and ideas!

More practically, intentionality means being open to all aspects of the phenomenon, not leaving out what belongs. Spiegelberg said "The genuine will to know calls for the spirit of generosity rather than for that of economy...." (1965, p. 657.)

## Bracketing

Bracketing, also called phenomenological reduction or the epoché, is the other side of the coin. Bracketing means setting aside all our usual, "natural" assumptions about the phenomena. You can't hear it if you are loudly telling it what it is!

Practically speaking, this means we must put aside our biases, prejudices, theories, philosophies, religions, even common sense, and accept the phenomenon for what it is. If therapists brought all their prejudices into the therapy situation with them, they would never be able to understand their clients in all their frustrating uniqueness. The same is true for any phenomenon.

This seems obvious. But the most common bias for psychology students is one actually encouraged by mainstream psychology: that knowledge means measurement, cause-and-effect, and reductionism! So psychologists and their students say that anger is "really" sympathetic nervous system activation, or that blue is "really" certain wavelengths of electromagnetic energy, or that thoughts are "really" just neural activity. Yet these explanations are nowhere to be found in experience!

So bracketing ultimately means a suspension of belief in the existence or non-existence of the phenomenon: We must not be concerned with explanations of what the phenomenon "really" might be.

## Project

The first project is the phenomenological description of a particular phenomenon, a momentary happening or thing, something full of its uniqueness. Spiegelberg (1965) outlines three "steps:"

**1. Intuiting** – Experience or recall the phenomenon. "Hold" it in your awareness, or live in it, be involved in it.... Dwell in or on it.

**2. Analyzing** – Try looking for the following:

- the pieces, parts, in the spatial sense;
- the episodes and sequences, in the temporal sense;
- the qualities and dimensions of the phenomenon.
- settings, environments, surroundings;
- the prerequisites and consequences in time;
- the perspectives or approaches one can take.
- cores or foci and fringes or horizons;
- the appearing and disappearing of the phenomena;
- the clarity of the phenomenon.

And you must investigate these many aspects both in their outward forms – objects, actions, others – and in their inward forms – thoughts, images, feelings.

A common problem in the analyzing phase is what I call "walking away" from the phenomenon: You start "free-associating" – "this reminds me of the time I...." Some might argue that that remembrance is also a phenomenon. That's true, but it isn't the one you are studying. When describing the physical environment of an experience, you don't say it's in Pennsylvania, the United States of America, planet earth, milky way galaxy...; neither should you drift too far afield psychologically.

**3. Describing** – Write it down. Write it as if the reader had never had the experience. Guide them through your intuiting and analyzing.

A problem in the describing phase is our tendency to write "for" something other than the description: We write for other people. Perhaps we wish to entertain them, so we use literary devices, get dramatic or poetic or novelistic, or sink into clichés. Perhaps we are writing for our teachers, professors, or professional colleagues and, to avoid their censure, we get "academic," with technical jargon and A.P.A.-style

obsessiveness. Simple language is preferred; anything else adds too much to (or takes away from) the phenomenon. If possible, relate your experience to familiar things or similar ones. If not, you may have to make use of more creative devices, e.g. description by negation ("it's not like this..."), metaphors, and analogies.

An important note, though: Intuiting comes first (even though you will have to go back to it any number of times). Spiegelberg (1965, p. 673) put it nicely: "Phenomenology begins in silence."

Your first project: In class, describe the experience of drinking a cup of cranberry juice. Don't just use your recollection: Actually drink some, slowly, savoring the experience. See if you can get a page or so of description. Take about 20 minutes. Then share your description with the class.

Alternative or additional exercises: Describe any sensual experience – tastes, smells, the feel of something like fur or silk, a repeated sound (e.g. a single, low note played on a cello), or humming "om" as a class. The only constraints for this beginning exercise is simplicity and clarity.

### 3. An Anger Workshop

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This time, we're going to take a look at anger. Three things will make this exercise more interesting, and more difficult as well:

First, we'll be taking the workshop approach, introduced by Herbert Spiegelberg (1986). By sharing our analyses with each other, we can help each other to develop full, unbiased descriptions.

Second, we'll be looking at something more "noesis" than "noema," more act than object. A feeling like anger isn't so directly available to us for analysis: We must look at it as it is reflected in the way it affects our view of the world, our thoughts and images, ourselves and others.

And third, we'll be describing, not a single, unique event, but a whole category of events – anger in general. That means we have to look beyond the details of different episodes of anger for the commonalities, called essences. (More on this in the next exercise.)

Here are the steps: Think about a particular time when you were very angry. Try to recall it as fully as you can, and jot down a brief description that will communicate the experience to others. This brief description is called a protocol. It should be a simple, natural thing – the actual phenomenology has not yet begun! Then, in a group of three or four, share your descriptions – either pass them around to read, or read them outloud. Take some time to ask each other questions about the experiences.

The next step is to analyze the descriptions with an eye to developing an overall description of anger (not just a description of three or four individual examples of anger). Look for the commonalities, what makes anger anger. Also look for exceptions, or for dimensions along which anger can vary. In addition to the protocols, consider any other experiences of anger, as you analyze, that suggest what is universal to anger and what is incidental. Test out any assertions by trying to think of an actual experience that contradicts the assertion. And so on!

Let me help a little, at the risk of prejudicing your descriptions. Here are some of the questions you might ask your experiences in order to extract the essences of anger:

1. How does it come on?
2. What happens to your experience of your body?
3. How does the world seem different?
4. What thoughts and feelings come upon you?
5. What acts do you need or want to do?
6. How does it dissipate?
7. What preconditions were there (set, mood)?
8. What outside triggers were there?

Some points to keep in mind:

1. Note the importance of intuiting. Do more than recall the experience; try to re-experience it, strongly, repeatedly. "Call" on it. You will note that recalling angry moments may make you angry again, especially if the experience remains unresolved!
2. Note the importance of bracketing. Whenever you sense yourself drifting away from the experiential into the theoretical, put on the brakes! Whenever you hear yourself using a conceptual term, ask yourself: To what experience does that term point to? Or does it? A small example: You may find yourself talking about the "storing up" of anger – what does that mean, experientially?
3. Whenever things get "easy," think: Have I had experiences that are exceptions to this "rule?" Look at the extremes as well as the "norms," or at the mundane versions if you've gotten too involved in extremes. For example, look at both anger that ended in violence and anger that we hold in and live with.

4. Beware premature closure: When you think you're done, you are probably nowhere near; You've probably missed something important.

Alternatives or additional exercises: Almost any emotion will do, though strong negative ones like anger, fear, and disgust are best to start with. Sexual desire is also a good one, if the group is sufficiently uninhibited. Other acts are a bit more difficult: judging, deciding, willing, attending, ignoring, etc.

### A Student's Protocol on Anger

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(Please note that this is a sample of a protocol, not of an analysis. This is the kind of description a phenomenologist asks others to give, and which he or she then analyzes, together with many other protocols.)

Sophomore year was going to be great. The idea of all five of us girls living in the same dorm held promises of good times to come. Unfortunately, I did not anticipate the humiliation and anger that the notion held as well.

No words can describe the sheer anger and frustration I felt when I learned that my four best friends had gotten together behind my back and decided to room together – leaving me without a roommate. What made the situation worse was the fact that we had previously discussed the possibilities of this arrangement and had decided to room separately in order to avoid hurting anyone's feelings – how thoughtful we had all been at the time.

When my girlfriends finally told me of their decision I went, as they say, "off the wall." I couldn't believe they, my best friends, could be so cruel. I yelled, screamed, and cried with every last bit of energy I could summon from my body and then I stormed out of the room.

I was so much more than angry. I was furious, seething, livid – no words can really do my feelings justice. Every vein in my body stuck out, my heartbeat raced, adrenaline shot through my body, my shoulders and neck muscles tensed up, my head pounded – and yet despite these distracting conditions, my senses and my general awareness reached new heights. I must have been aware of every sight and sound that took place in the dorm that night – and sleep was a long way off.

As I lay in my room, crying, I hated the girls – I wished that I could hurt them as much as they hurt me and that I could somehow get back at them and make their lives miserable. I hated the world as well. I hashed and rehashed almost everything that had ever gone wrong at college and I saw everyone I knew as being cold, heartless, and apathetic to my problems. I longed to strike out at someone, anyone, anything that would help reduce the pain and anger welled up inside my body – but relief had to wait until morning.

After hours of crying, tossing, and turning, I helped myself (the only way I know how) by falling asleep and removing the anger from my consciousness. The next morning when I woke up I felt, as I always do, as if some of the anger had been whittled away from my system. After a phone call to my boyfriend, the rest of my anger subsided and all that remained was dull pain and disappointment.

My relationship with my girlfriends has certainly been strained. But now the anger is gone and my body and mind are no longer mobilized. I can work on forgiving my friends and forgetting the situation that caused me to hate the people I care about the most.

## 4 The Essence of Disgust

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In the last exercise, we started going beyond the individual, unique phenomenon, and looked for essences. Essences refer to patterns, structures, invariant features..., what is necessary rather than merely incidental to the phenomena..., what, in some "class" of phenomena, is essential to the class, makes them what they are, causes us to think of them as belonging together. We were trying to describe anger, not just some individual examples of anger.

The "essence" of describing essences is simply to look at a series of exemplary phenomena. Examine as many examples of anger as you can, for example, and keep your mind open to the commonalities.

There are techniques to help you to distinguish necessities from incidentals. One is called free variation. Once you have a decent description of a phenomenon or essence, you may want to "add" or "subtract" pieces of that description: If you are describing triangles, adding a fourth side or removing one angle leaves you with something other than a triangle; on the other hand, coloring the triangle blue or constructing it out of wood makes no impact on "triangleness." The number of sides and angles are essential to triangles, while color and substance are incidental. Free variation tests the limits of a description.

Notice that much of this is done "in one's mind." Einstein called these mind experiments; Husserl called them free imaginative variations.

Another way of getting at essences is to play with metaphors. A common metaphor in the description of anger, for example, is "I felt like a volcano about to explode." Well, what is it about volcanoes that reminds you of anger? It is easier, sometimes, to see what two things that are fundamentally different have in common, like volcanoes and anger, than it is to see what two very similar things, like two episodes of anger, have in common.

For this exercise, please as a class discuss disgust, with all its different meanings – disgust with food, with filth, with ideas, with people, etc. – and try to discover its essence. Make use of free imaginative variation and metaphor.

## 5 Protocols of Friendship

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Doing a phenomenological study on your own is difficult, and you run the risk that your own uniqueness will mislead you. On the other hand, it isn't always convenient to gather together a bunch of fellow-phenomenologists for a workshop-style study. We can get around these problems by using protocols. A protocol in phenomenology is a personal account, a casual, natural description. No real effort is made to be phenomenological; in fact, the protocols are usually made by "ordinary people." When you have a number of these protocols, you analyze and describe as you might a series of your own experiences. This technique, as you will see, shades into structural methods, and some criticism of it is justified: You substitute a quantity of protocols for the quality that depends on thorough intuiting and careful bracketing. Nonetheless, any technique that may add to our understanding should not be overlooked.

To do this project, you will each have to ask someone to write a short account of how he or she became "best friends" with his or her best friend. If you can't find someone, write your own. Make three or four copies of these protocols to pass around to the members of your group. When you get into your groups, read them carefully, more than once even. Then discuss them as you did in the previous exercise. Then individually write a description of falling in love. The whole process should take you about two hours.

An important point: Every ten minutes or so of your discussion, think to yourself (or say aloud!) "Are we still on the topic, or have we wandered? Are we describing or moralizing? Are we talking about what is or about what should be?" There is nothing wrong with values – they are an important topic in phenomenology – except when the task at hand is something else!

"Becoming friends," more clearly than "anger," is an encounter, a dialog, a social interaction. The experiences of the other are crucial, while they need not be when you are angry. So, for additional and alternative projects, consider other encounters: meeting someone, falling in love, falling in lust, making small-talk, trying to convince someone of something, being significantly influenced by someone, arguing, making up....

A helpful hint: Focus on that brief moment in time when you first recognized that there had been a change in your relationship from "stranger" or "acquaintance" to "friend" or "best friend." Then work out from there – what was happening just prior to the change, what happened just after, and so on. Note the emotions, thoughts, imagery, perceptions (especially of the friend), behaviors, attitudes.

Or try it the other way around: You were acquaintances once ("t1"); you are friends a day, a month, a year later ("t2"). How were you different at t1 and t2? How were things different? Then go back and "fill in" the transition from t1 to t2.

## Romance: A Partial Analysis

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Romance is a mood or state of mind akin to several others, including love, friendship, sexual interest, contentment, self-assuredness, and so on.

It is normally experienced in the context of an actual relationship, although it may be experienced in other ways, such as in fantasy, expectation, or possibility. It may also be experienced vicariously, such as when watching a romantic movie or real couples in romantic situations. It is even experienced occasionally with friends or relations.

It is, more specifically, associated with courtship and with the intimations of sexuality that go with it. It is itself, however, not primarily sexual. In fact, it often has an innocent feel to it, and is associated with "puppy" love, first love, early flirtations, and the like.

Romance often involves courtship symbols, traditions, and stereotypes, such as flowers, gifts, hand-holding, candle-lit dinners, "romantic" music, .... These, however, are not essential, but rather seem to derive from certain natural ways of expressing romantic feelings. Once upon a time, they were probably original! These symbols, etc., are now often used to "set the stage" for romance.

The romantic state of mind seems to come on rather suddenly, a matter of rather abruptly becoming aware of being in a romantic moment. It very often involves surprise. This is where many of the aforementioned symbols come into play: Romance often involves being surprised by signs of someone's affection, whether it be in the form of a gift, a helping hand, an appreciative glance, a confidence shared, or what have you.

Associated with surprise is the sense of great motion, lightness, being swept up in the moment, or swept off your feet! On the other hand, some people instead focus on a feeling of steadiness and solidity, reflecting the firmness of a commitment or the solidity of a relationship, especially in adversity. The lightness in oneself and the steadiness of the other are by no means incompatible.

There is often a degree of gender stereotyping involved in romance: "He made me feel pretty, feminine.... He is my knight in shining armor.... He swept me off my feet.... I found comfort in his broad shoulders...." These comments are used to good advantage in romance novels, but have their sources in ordinary experience. In men, we find similar statements, in reverse: "She made me feel strong, like a real man...." Please note that this is not to be understood as a "power thing," but rather an awareness of the need to care for a woman, to "nurture." The connection with courtship seems quite strong, despite the many exceptions.

The mood may come upon both people naturally, but it is often "arranged for" by one or the other. The structure of the romantic episode seems best left simple and it is greatly enhanced by at least the appearance of spontaneity.

Circumstances can be very important. A small gesture or sign of support in adverse circumstances can be far more valuable than great generosity in good circumstances. Romance seems, in fact, to thrive on adversity, as in our common recollections of our "poor days."

This introduces as well the symbolism of the hero and the fair maiden in fairy tales. Selfless help in adversity, revealing deep affection, is a theme common to most fairy tales, many movies, and many real-life romantic moments as well.

The key feeling would seem to be one of a heightened self-worth seen as coming from the other person. Examples would include feeling especially attractive, important, strong, interesting, intelligent, and so on. Even the sense that one has been involved in something important can bring on a sense of romance. The increase in self-worth, curiously, results in an increase in one's valuing of or affection for the other.

Paradoxically, these feelings can also occur in reverse, so that coming upon the other person in circumstances that lead you to particularly value him or her may lead to feelings of strength, security, confidence, etc., and this too is felt as romantic! Common to both is the sense of being fortunate or lucky to be you, to be there, to be with this person.

Other aspects of a romantic mental state include (a) lightness, airiness, giddiness, a glow, excitement, enchantment, joking and laughing; (b) coziness, cuddling, contentment, comfort, closeness; and (c) riskiness, danger, and naughtiness. Set (a) seems most common, with the others being variation, and (c) being the least common, but certainly not rare.

The essence of romance seems to me to be the sudden discovery or bringing to awareness (whether by accident or by arrangement) of your importance or value to another, along with an awareness of their value to you. It is a confirmation that one is "lovable" or worthy of affection, whether in the eyes of a desirable young man or woman or in the context of a long, comfortable marriage. This confirmation comes with many of the qualities associated with other kinds of "ego-transcendence" or "ego-expansion," such as love itself: By losing yourself in your affection for another, you become stronger as an individual. As is often mentioned, it is just one of those things that defies logic!

Part Two:  
Structural Analysis

## 6 Structural Analysis

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Structural analysis is essentially the search for meanings that have been "embedded" in products or artifacts – e.g. verbal expressions, literature, social structures, cultural rituals, artwork, technologies, techniques – by others.

In phenomenology "proper," we are describing what's going on in someone's experiencing – our's or someone else's. At most, we ask for protocols, which we normally check with follow-up interviews. But these things are not always possible:

1. The person or people may not be around, so all you have is their records (literature, autobiographies, diaries, art, music, crafts...).
2. Protocols, interviews, or dialog assume a degree of shared understanding to begin with, a certain "research sophistication" one cannot always assume.
3. Much of noeses is unconscious. Phenomenologists agree with Freud that the unconscious can be made conscious; but Freud also pointed out that much that's unconscious "wants" to stay that way.

Each of these problems is regularly faced by students in several fields: Problem one is faced in art and literary criticism, cultural archeology, and psychohistory; problem two is faced in cultural anthropology and sociology, and in cross-cultural psychology; problem three is faced in linguistics, cognitive development, and psychoanalysis.

The most common method for dealing with these situations is structural analysis: You look at a set of phenomena and attempt to dis-cover the meaning structures on the "far side" of the phenomena, i.e. the meaning structures of others.

Here's how the structuralist Roland Barthes explains it (in Lane, 1970):

The goal of all structuralist activity...is to reconstruct an "object" in such a way as to manifest thereby the rules of functioning...of this object. Structure is therefore actually a simulacrum of the object, but a direct, interested simulacrum, since the imitated object makes something appear which remained invisible or, if one prefers, unintelligible in the natural object.

Taken like this, we are really just describing science. Theory-building is the construction of a simulacrum or model. Structuralists are simply focusing on meaning structures, rather than physical ones.

You might, for example, create a computer model of human problem-solving, which imitates the "visible" aspects of that ability. We know how our computer works and suggest that the human mind works like our model. We do not suggest that the human mind is "nothing but" a wet computer – this is the fallacy of reductionism, or the fallacy of "nothing-but-ism," as I prefer to call it. This is mistaking the map for the territory.

A good way to get comfortable with structural analysis is to play certain games – for example, Mastermind. One player chooses four marbles from a set with six colors, duplication of color permitted, and arranges them in a particular order. The other player attempts to figure out the order and colors from clues given by the first player in response to his previous guess: A white peg says that you have guessed one correct color in its correct location; a black peg says that you have guessed a correct color, but the position is wrong. Four white pegs, therefore, would indicate that you have guessed all four marbles correctly. The game can be nicely played by substituting A, B, C, D, E, and F for the colored marbles, and \* and + for the white and black pegs, respectively.

There are two things I would like you to get out of this and the next couple of exercises: First, I want you to develop habits of patient, even pain-staking, analysis. Most of us are so used to doing things as quickly and (supposedly) efficiently, that we have lost these habits. Structural methods – and qualitative methods

generally – require patience. Think of them as something akin to working with a teaspoon and a paint brush at an archeological dig! Second, I want you to develop a feel for patterns. With practice, patterns (structures, essences...) will begin to jump out at you, like finally seeing the hidden image in a Magic Eye picture. You may find yourself amazed at how perceptual these supposedly cognitive things can be!

(The old board game Clue is probably the best known game of this type. Another game is called Nature, and works like this: One player is "nature" and lists on a piece of paper one, two, three or more rules for discarding cards – e.g. if the last card discarded was black, the next must be red – making sure that the rules will permit the discarding of all cards at some point. The other players are dealt equal numbers of cards and are required to guess the rules by discarding and having that discard accepted or rejected. First player to get rid of all his or her cards wins and becomes the next "nature.")

## 7 Tic Tac Toe

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Let's get right into a structural analysis. Get into your "small group." First, describe the structure of tic tac toe, including the discriminations a player must be able to make and the rules of play. Then describe the structure of the strategy of tic tac toe, i.e. what you must do to win!

Please note that there are many things in life that have the same basic structure as games. Social rituals, for example, have things you must recognize and rules to follow. Yet they too permit one to "play" within their basic structure. Some of us are good at the game, some of us are competitive, some are cooperative, some play badly, and some don't want to play at all! Some social scientists believe that all human interaction can be understood as games, tactics, and strategies.

Alternative exercises: Do an analysis of the rules or the strategy of any game or sport. Or do an analysis of the rules of grammar for some language, or the rules of phonetics or spelling.

## 8 Component of Kinship

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The two areas making most use of structural analysis are anthropology and linguistics. In anthropology, it is most clearly found in a part of ethnography (the description of cultures) called ethnoscience, which looks to discover how a different culture organizes its understanding of some domain – botany, zoology, musicology, and so on. But an older area than ethnoscience is the analysis of kinship systems by means of a technique called componential analysis.

Let's warm up by looking at English kinship: The basic terms are mother (M), father (F), sister (S), brother (B), son (s), daughter (d), wife, husband, aunt, uncle, and cousin. Qualifying words, affixes, and phrases include "grand-," "great," "first," "second," etc., and "once-removed," "twice-removed," etc. We won't be concerned here with "-in-law," "step-," "half," and so on. The first step is, in fact, to list as many terms as possible.

The next step is to have an informant (in this case, yourself) define these terms for you, occasionally probing for detail and variations:

Mother is a female parent.

Father is a male parent.

An uncle is a brother of your father or mother, or the husband of an aunt.

A great grandfather is the father of the father or mother of your father or mother.

...and so on. Another approach is to collect examples of each specific term: A cousin includes the children and other descendants of uncles and aunts, the children and other descendants of great uncles and aunts, etc.

The next step is to organize the terms on the basis of similarities of or patterns in their definitions:

Mother and father "belong together."

Mother and daughter should be close together – they are "opposites."

Cousins are "the most different" from the more "nuclear" terms.

...and so on. The point is to discover the basic components of meaning in the kinship system. For example:

Mother and father are both parents, female and male respectively.

Uncles and aunts, like brothers and sisters, are siblings (or the husbands or wives of siblings).

Parents, grandparents, great grandparents, etc. are ancestors at various distances.

When you have your components, you go back and redefine your kinship terms in terms of these components:

Mother is a female parent.

An uncle is a male sibling of a parent, or the spouse of a female sibling of a parent.

A cousin can be specified in terms of first, second, and so on, by counting how many generations back from oneself or from the cousin, whichever number is larger, you have to go to find the siblings that tie you together; and a cousin can be specified in terms of once-removed, twice-removed, and so on, by subtracting the shortest of those two distances from the largest. (Check it out, or check out Geoffrey Leech's discussion of English kinship in his book *Semantics*, 1974.)

But English kinship is too easy for you. This project involves the analysis of the kinship system of the Seneca Iroquois Indians, following one of the earliest formal componential analyses by Floyd Lounsbury (1964). On the next page is a partial list of kinship terms, with very approximate English translations, and with a list of specific relatives that one would call by each kinship term. Note that "MFSD," for example, means "mother's father's sister's daughter."

To be precise, the task is this: If I were to give you the details of the relationship between you and "alter" (that is, a relative of yours, such as MMBdsd – your mother's mother's brother's daughter's son's daughter), what rules would you need to know to determine the proper term of relationship, so that you'd never need a chart again!

Here are the steps to take in a structural analysis:

1. List the specific instances. In this case, I'm giving you the list. "In the field," you would have had to collect them by asking many people many questions.
2. Organize the specific instances. Lounsbury has made it easier for you by arranging and dividing the terms into revealing patterns.
3. Deduce the rules from the organization. The better you've done the previous step, the easier this one will be.
4. Go back and carefully test your rules with some "free variation."

Divide into small groups and give it your best shot.

## Seneca Kinship

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1. ha'nih "my father" – F, FB, FMSs, FFBS, FMBs, FFSs, FFFBss, etc.
2. no'yêh "my mother" – M, MS, MMSd, MFBd, MMBd, MFSd, MMMSdd, etc.
3. hakhno'sêh "my uncle" – MB, MMSs, MFBs, MMBs, MFSs, MMMSds, etc.
4. ake:hak "my aunt" – FS, FMSd, FFBd, FMBd, FFSd, FFFBsd, etc.
5. hahtsi' "my elder brother" – B, MSs, FBs, MMSds, FFBss, MFBds, FMSss, MMBds, etc. (when older than ego)
6. he'kê:' "my younger brother" – (same, when younger than ego)
7. ahtsi' "my elder sister" – S, MSd, FBd, MMSdd, FFBsd, MFBdd, FMSsd, MMBdd, etc. (when older than ego)
8. khe'kê:' "my younger sister" – (same, when younger than ego)
9. akyä:'se:' "my cousin" – MBs, FSs, MMSss, FFBds, MFBss, FMSds, MMBss, etc. also: MBd, FSd, MMSsd, FFBdd, MFBsd, FMSdd, MMBsd, etc.
10. he:awak "my son" – (a) s, Bs, MSss, FBss, MBss, FSss, MMSdss, etc. for male ego  
– (b) s, Ss, MSds, FBds, MBds, FSds, MMSdds, etc. for female ego
11. khe:awak "my daughter" – (a) d, Bd, MSsd, FBsd, MBsd, FSsd, MMSdsd, etc. for male ego  
– (b) d, Sd, MSdd, FBdd, MBdd, FSdd, MMSddd, etc. for female ego
12. heyê:wô:tê' "my nephew" – Ss, MSds, FBds, MBds, FSds, MMSdds, etc. for male ego
13. hehsô'neh "my nephew" – Bs, MSss, FBss, MBss, FSss, MMSdss, etc. for female ego

14. kheyê:wô:tê' "my niece" – Sd, MSdd, FBdd, MBdd, FSdd, MMSddd, etc. for male ego
15. khehsô'neh "my niece" – Bd, MSsd, FBsd, MBsd, FSsd, MMSdsd, etc. for female ego

## An Aside About Kinship

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Some students get rather bored at this point and ask the famous question "Why are we doing this?"

First of all, kinship is the most basic system of social relationships there is. Some would argue that all others are based on it (e.g. Eric Berne, 1966).

Secondly, we tend to see our own system as "the" system, and others as somehow "wierd." I don't want you to be so egocentric! And we have to break our tendencies to see the mind of the "primitive" as somehow childish or simple. Any mind that can handle Australian Aboriginal kinship or the marriage rules of the Yanomamo Indians of Venezuela is as capable as any in our society.

But the main reason is that I want you to learn to "think," that is, to perceive subtle patterns in complex information. With practice at kinships analysis (etc.), you develop a "sense for structures." You could go into an alien society and discover their kinship system and their language and their social, political, and economic systems.

Are you interested in medicine? You can go to a famous diagnostic physician – one with "great intuition" – and look at his diagnoses, listen to him talking to himself, record his specific observations – and, with structural analysis, write a program that reveals his intuitions to medical students, or might even provide other doctors with an instant "second opinion."

Are you interested in industrial and organizational psychology? You can look at a company's organization (both formal and informal), at its culture, communications systems, specific "unconscious" skills of its employees, at training programs, and go on to suggest changes in these and other aspects of the company's functioning.

Are you interested in clinical psychology? You can look at the communications within a family and reveal them to the family. You can look at the pragmatics of interaction between client and therapist from a theory-free point of view. And so on.

## 9 Ethnomusicology

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Our next project is an elicitation interview, that is, a conversation with someone with the purpose of getting data about their image of reality which we might then submit to structural analysis. Until now, we have started with our lists ready made. We have been cheating!

For example, we might want to develop an understanding of someone's "ethnozoology" – i.e. how they categorize animals. Here's an imaginary dialog:

R (researcher): Tell me, would you, what is that (pointing to an animal)?

I (informant): That is a cat.

R: What kind of animal is a cat?

I: It is a meat-eater.

R: What other kinds of meat-eaters are there?

I: Oh, there's dogs, wolves, bears, rats, a few others.

R: Do some of these meat-eaters belong together?

I: Yes: Dogs and wolves belong together. So do rats and similar animals. Bears are different.

R: Is there something you call both dogs and wolves?

I: No.

R: How about rats and the similar animals – is there something you call that group of animals?

I: Yes, we call them vermin.

R: I see. What kind of animals are meat-eaters?

I: I don't know what you mean: They are just animals.

R: Are there other kinds of animals?

I: Sure. There are vegetable-eaters.

R: What kinds of vegetable-eaters are there?

I: Well, there's the little ones and the hoofed ones.

R: Can you give me some examples of the little ones?

I: Yes: There are rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks, woodchucks, and...that's all I can think of.

R: Do any of these belong together?

I: Yes, the squirrels and the chipmunks do – they are tree-dwellers.

R: And the hoofed animals – what are some examples of these?

I: Deer, Cattle, Horses, Moose, Elk....

R: Any of these belong together?

I: Yes, the deer, moose, and elk belong together.

R: Is there a name for them?

I: They are the antlered animals.

R: Tell me, what kind of animal is that (pointing to a bird)?

I: Ah, that's not an animal. That's a spirit.

There are actually only a few questions the researcher is asking:

1. What is that?
2. "Moving up" (What kind of x is that?)
3. "Moving down" (What kinds of x are there?)
4. Clustering (Do any of these belong together, and what do you call these clusters?)

There are other questions:

1. At the very top of a hierarchy, you might have to ask: What else is there besides what we mentioned? Our researcher here assumed that we would get to birds under animals, but the informant considered birds a whole different form of reality.
2. At the very bottom of the hierarchy, we might need to check for completeness by asking for full lists – for example, of those other "vermin" the informant mentioned.

And, if we are truly interested in how our informant construed his reality, we need to ask questions like: What's the difference between x and y? (e.g. between animals and spirits, between vermin and other meat eaters, between deer and elk). And how do you tell?

Remember: Your "anchors" in all of this are (1) specific words or phrases and (2) phenomenal referents – i.e. specific experiences that can be shared between researcher and informant (this animal here, this particular feature, this structural characteristic, etc. – things more easily shown than described). If you are using more than one informant (as is smart, if you are trying to get to an ethno-zoology, and not an idiosyncratic one), it is again these two – terms and referents – that form your anchors, this time in terms of common points-of-reference.

In the example, we were eliciting a taxonomy. You can do the exact same thing to elicit a rule system. The precise questions change, that's all: What's that? What happens next? What happens if...? How do you know? and so on.

The project for today is to find a partner and elicit each other's understandings of the varieties of modern popular music. This is what ethnoscientists call an "ethnomusicology."

## An Ethnozoology

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### animals

meat-eaters

cats

\*

dogs

wolves

bears

veggie-eaters

little-ones

vermin

rabbits

tree-dwellers

squirrels

chipmunks

woodchucks

others

hoofed-ones

horses

cattle

antlered-ones

deer

moose

elk

### spirits

birds

ancestors

Part Three:  
Observation

## 10 Observation

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It is so convenient that we have language: We can ask people what they see, think, feel..., and they'll tell us! It is, of course, not the only way in which we can get to know about others. Much can be gained by simple observation.

For this exercise, I would like you to describe the structure of a television show in as much detail as you can. There are two steps to doing this, which require that you view the show (at least) twice:

First, describe the "physical" structure of the show, that is, what happens in space and time, the characters, the scenes, the plot.

Second, describe the "meaningful" structure of the show, i.e. the themes, motifs, images, metaphors, the emotional movement, the way in which it involves you. The first is like writing down the music; the second is like recording how the music feels.

It might be preferable to all do the same show, in class, so that you can compare descriptions and improve them.

We can do research on such nicely available and reviewable things as films, works of art or literature, theatrical presentations, dance, and (of course) television shows. We can also do research on social rituals in real life: a marriage ceremony, a religious ritual, a job interview, how we greet a friend, how we behave in restaurants, what happens in an elevator, water cooler behavior.... These are subtler, more slippery, less easy to "rewind" for review. But the same processes apply.

An example of such a description follows.

### A Structural Analysis of "Winnie The Pooh And Tigger, Too"

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The introduction: Establishes characters and the centrality of Pooh. Prepares me emotionally for something light, "cute."

#### Part I

1. Pooh sits thinking, when Tigger surprisingly enters and "bounces" Pooh. Bouncing established as the focal behavior. Pooh is established as very sympathetic, but Tigger is introduced as obnoxious.
2. A reprise of 1, wherein Tigger bounces Piglet. Establishes Rabbit as the "antagonist" ("I'm savin' my best bounce for old longears").
3. Tigger bounces Rabbit, and causes general destruction, which he doesn't even recognize as the result of his behavior. Tigger is characterized as insensitive to others. Bouncing is firmly established as something "bad."
4. A meeting is held. It emphasizes Rabbit's perspective (Pooh sleeps), and begins to establish Rabbit as an "anal" personality and less than sympathetic (vs. Pooh's attractive detachment, and Piglet's role as "follower"). Rabbit develops the "big explore" idea to humiliate Tigger out of bouncing. But the idea of retribution is unpleasant.

**Summary:** The conflict established in part I is between childishness (and irresponsibility, represented by Tigger) and adulthood (with a hint of self-righteousness, portrayed by Rabbit). We are left with a degree of

tension and uncertainty.

## Part II

1. The big explore begins, during which Pooh's incessant need for honey is pointed out. Rabbit, Piglet, and Pooh "lose" Tigger (through Tigger's own enthusiasm – he bounds ahead of them). Their cold-heartedness is emphasized when they hide in the log to make sure Tigger remains lost. Our sympathy for Tigger is at a high point, and for Rabbit at a low point.
2. Rabbit, Piglet, and Pooh attempt to return home but discover they are lost (as dramatically represented by the walking-in-circles gag). There is a strong sense that Rabbit is not "in touch" (vs. Pooh who is). Rabbit comes off as pompous. Yet we do feel some sympathy: It is clear that Rabbit can only see things his way.
3. Piglet and Pooh return home through Pooh's tummy homing device. Rabbit's inability to deal with things on a more immediate basis is explained by Pooh: "I didn't hear them (the honey pots) before because Rabbit would talk."
4. They are bounced by Tigger, who is not at all lost (the splendid idea has failed). So, paradoxically, the dumb one "can't get lost," while the smart one can. Tigger goes off to find Rabbit.
5. Rabbit is thoroughly lost, and in a high tension segment, his mind begins to play tricks on him, until he too is found and bounced. He is dragged home in complete humiliation.

**Summary:** The contrast between "adult" and "child" is further explored, with the pluses of childlike instinct and the minuses of adult thinking/talking/scheming emphasized.

## Part III

1. Roo and Tigger go off to play. Establishes bouncing as fun, emphasized by Kanga's adult overconcern. Tigger seen in a clear new light.
2. Skating scene: Rabbit enjoys himself skating. Tigger, in a typical display of bravado, imitates Rabbit only to cause, once again, a disaster for poor Rabbit. A reminder of Tigger's negative side: the braggado and the excuse "Tiggers don't like ice-skating." Legitimacy of Rabbit's perspective maintained.
3. Roo and Tiger continue their search for "what Tiggers do best," resulting in the reckless climbing of the tree. Tigger is terrified by the results of his actions. In light of his recklessness, this terror seems like "just desserts."
4. In a light-hearted side-piece, Pooh and Piglet track themselves and eventually discover Tigger and Roo's dilemma.
5. Everyone (Pooh, Piglet, Kanga, Rabbit, and especially Christopher Robin) come to Tigger and Roo's aid. In his fear, Tigger makes a promise never to bounce again, and Rabbit insists they take him up on it. In a bizarre side gag, the narrator saves Tigger.
6. In the last moments of the story, we go through Tigger's ultimate humiliation. Note how annoying the continued smirk on Rabbit's face becomes, and the effect of Tigger's true sadness. Significantly, the child (Roo) is the one who brings up the value of the "old Tigger." An outpouring of sympathy from the other characters (and the audience) puts pressure on Rabbit to rescind his demands. Tigger bounces Rabbit and encourages all to bounce with him.

**Summary:** The child's perspective wins over the adult. But both Tigger and Rabbit are forgiven their excesses. We have a happy ending and complete closure.

## 11 Participant Observation

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Structural analysis gives us the social meanings of a kinship system, for example, but not the meanings that structure has to the participant as a person. The descriptions tend to be "cold:" ceremonies without celebrants. We want something "warmer" – to understand the experiences of others, to put ourselves in their place.

Immersing oneself in an alien way of life in order to gain knowledge, an understanding, of that way of life is called participant observation: "intense social interaction between researcher and the subjects, in the milieu of the latter" (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975. p. 5). Although some knowledge can be acquired by observation, it is difficult to get the depth we are looking for from that detached a perspective. Involvement is the price for getting at the meanings people give their social environment and behavior.

Perhaps the most outstanding characteristic of fieldwork is the unstructured nature of it, especially at first! "Unlike controlled studies, such as surveys and experiments, field studies avoid prejudgement of the nature of the problem and hence the use of rigid data-gathering devices and hypotheses based upon a-priori beliefs or hunches concerning the research setting and its participants" (Shaffir et al., 1980, p. 17).

### Problems

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The pitfalls of participant observation are not that different from the pitfalls of experimental research. Here, too, we look for validity – the accuracy of our description – and reliability – the replicability of our description by other observers. And we find subject (or reactive) effects, researcher (or demand) effects, and sampling effects, just like in the laboratory. But these are technical terms that, in fact, overlap and interact like gangbusters. Instead, let me just list some of the problems:

1. People try to "look good," to give good impressions.
2. People often try to please you, to give you what they think you want.
3. People sometimes try to screw you, mislead you, or put you on.
4. People try to figure things out, look for what you are after.
5. People often try to play an "appropriate" part (role selection), rather than being fully themselves.
6. People may suddenly come to see the researcher as a researcher (loss of trust), which can feel like suddenly realizing you have no clothes on.
7. People sometimes like to be looked at, and will act to retain that attention (the Hawthorne effect).
8. People have prejudices about the researcher, the psychologist, the sociologist, the academician, the college student...
9. Emotional involvement on the part of the researcher alters subjects' behaviors.
10. On the other hand, cool rationality on the part of the researcher does the same.
11. Feelings (love, hate) towards particular people can "blinker" us towards or away from their perceptions.
12. Researchers sometimes "go native," and total involvement means no more researcher.
13. We can alienate some subjects while mediating conflicts or giving advice.
14. We can turn off some subjects by associating with authorities.
15. Different cultures have different rules of exclusiveness regarding sex, age, and so on.

I very much doubt that this is a full list!

### Ethics

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But there are more problems: One of the most persistent and difficult is the problem of ethics. First, generally, do you or do you not participate in activities that are illegal, or that you consider immoral or unethical? My own feeling is that you should not present yourself to the people you are studying as something other than yourself. You may get carried away and feel like you are becoming one of them, but they rarely see you that way. Besides which, your goal is to learn about them, not become them. So your moral and ethical obligations are yours – and I believe that most groups will respect you for being yourself in this regard. Whether or not you then engage in illegal activities depends on your moral/ethical judgements and your willingness to risk legal punishment in exchange for the trust of your people.

If this strikes you as a small problem, consider the situation of someone who is trying to understand a culture or social group that operates outside the law (drug cultures, gangs, prostitutes...), or that practices activities that are abhorrent to us (animal sacrifices, torture, infanticide, incest...). Is the understanding worth the moral conflict? That has got to be up to you.

There are other ethical concerns that come with any fieldwork study: Should we conceal ourselves? Should we deceive our subjects? I think these are more easily answered: Would you like to be spied on or lied to?.

Finally, there is the ethical question "Who are we serving?" Who pays us? Who reads our writings? Who makes use of the information? What use is made of it? What access do my subjects have to this information? What rights do they have to review the description, criticize it, or even censor it? Sadly, many of our subject populations are precisely that: subject, dependent, powerless.... Think about the populations in all the social sciences: people in mental institutions, in prisons, in homes for the elderly; children in the school systems; college freshmen being offered points on their next exam; the poor, the disenfranchised, labor, people on reservations or in ghettos; primitive people, the illiterate, the isolated, and so on. And who do we work for? A well-to-do, powerful segment of western civilization. Make up your own mind.

## Project

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I would like you to describe "an evening with friends." As with the previous exercise, there are two aspects to look at: One is the "time-space" side – a straight forward description of what happened; The other is the more involved side – the personal, emotional, aspect.

Do not disturb the flow of things by taking notes or playing with a tape recorder. When the get together is over, go straight to your paper and pencil and write down, from memory, what happened. This is a technique very familiar to anthropologists and sociologists who are doing ethnographic studies. Then, at your leisure, convert those scribbles into an organized description.

Because these are your friends, perhaps we can take a little ethical liberty here: Don't tell them before hand that you'll be doing this. Instead, tell them afterwards, and show them your description. Ask them for their comments and record those as well.

P.S.: Always use pseudonyms in your descriptions!

## Savannah

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On Thursday, March 9th, 1995, my husband Craig and I were spending the afternoon in Savannah, Georgia, when we had a strange and wonderful experience. I have chosen this experience as my observer-participant assignment as it was unique, spontaneous and alien.

Four days earlier we had travelled south from Pennsylvania on a much needed vacation. We stopped in Durham and Pinehurst and arrived at our friends' home on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina late Tuesday evening. Thursday morning we decided to leave our base on Hilton Head and drive an hour southwest to

walk Savannah's waterfront and enjoy the beautiful spring day.

We had been told that Savannah's waterfront had been revitalized in recent years and that it was a fun place to spend an afternoon. We arrived in Savannah around noon, and easily found a parking place. Wearing sneakers and sweaters, and with film in my camera, we headed off towards the river. The streets were bustling with tourists visiting the many antique stores, candy-making shops and interesting restaurant-bars.

Apparently, the historic preservation people have been active in Savannah as most of the waterfront is quaintly alluring with cobblestone streets, original brick exteriors, and ornate iron grill work. The sound of blues and jazz snakes out from dark alleyways and open wooden doors contribute to the "Old South" flavor of the area.

Craig and I decided to have lunch in a small tavern called the Boar's Head. He had catfish and the crab soup, I had shrimp étouffé. We enjoyed our meal and listened with amusement to the four local women at the next table. To our Yankee ears their southern accents and conversation about "bein po and widowed" enhanced our dining experience. We left the Boar's Head to walk off our meal and perhaps take some pictures.

I enjoy taking black and white pictures with an old Canon SLR. The camera weighs about three pounds and is totally manual. It takes me a few minutes to adjust the shutter speed and aperture depending on the light. We were standing in front of an old cotton warehouse with an interesting view straight through the building to the river beyond. I took one picture and then was readjusting the camera when we were approached by an elderly couple.

The gentleman was wearing tan trousers, a tan courderoy sport coat, a brown fedora and carried a wooden cane with a bulldog handle. The woman had pure white hair and wore tan slacks, a sky blue jacket and had startling blue eyes exactly the same color as her coat.

The man said "Kin I hep youa?"

"No, we're just admiring the wonderful view. I'm taking a picture of the river framed by the brick walls" I replied.

"Kin we show youa aroun?" he said.

I looked at my husband and not wishing to be rude or disrespectful I said "That would be nice." I was expecting that the old man would point out some nearby landmarks and perhaps mention local history. He took the woman's arm and walked towards the door of the building. Craig and I followed. As we got closer to the building I noticed a small ornately painted sign that said Hostettler Realty.

"We kin go inside" the man said to Craig and me. The woman extracted keys from her pockets and pushed her hip against one side of the enormous wooden doors. Without ever deciding to enter, Craig and I were inside the old building. I felt slightly uneasy. I wondered what their motives were. I thought perhaps they were going to try to sell us something, maybe a timeshare. My eyes adjusted to the dim light of the room and I was awed by its simple beauty. The floors, walls and ceiling were paneled in a lovely honey oak that reminded me of an English manor. The large space was divided by a wooden arch that framed a spectacular floor to ceiling solid glass window. The river with its tugs and ships provided an ever-changing picture.

The man and the woman stayed close to the door. "Go on now, git right up to the window and lookee down the rivah."

I did what I was told and Craig came over to the window, too. I took a picture because that is what I felt they expected me to do. I looked at Craig. He said "This is really a nice place. Is this your office?" The old woman spoke for the first time. "Used to be. He don't do too much now. He's almost as blind as I em and neither of us git aroun too well anymo."

"We'd like ifin you all'd come up an visit wit us for a while" the old man said edging slowly towards the door. I felt like these courtly old people were the epitome of southern hospitality and that to decline their offer would be rude and ill mannered. Not wishing to be either but still uneasy about the situation, I said "We don't want to put you out."

"No bother. We insist, don we" he replied in his southern drawl. I had a fleeting sensation that I was in a Willa Cather novel or a Tennessee Williams play. I felt like the moment was out of my control. I was again suspicious. No one saw us enter this building. Our friends would report our absence and describe our clothing. Police detectives would question the waiter at the Boar's Head. The shopkeeper at the antique store we wandered through would remember us but would not be able to offer any useful information. Our mysterious disappearance would shatter our son's world. I was thinking like a lunatic! I walked toward Craig and the door.

As we approached the door the old woman turned to us as her outstretched hand felt for the door. "Is the door open?" she asked. Her strange eyes were clear and calm, unseeing and trusting. My suspicion vanished and I felt guilty about my wild imagination.

"Open" Craig said. We all walked into the hall. An ancient two-seater inclinor was on the paneled wall next to the worn burgundy steps.

"Hep on" the old man said to Craig and me.

"Oh no, we'll walk" Craig said as we exchanged astonished looks.

"Hep on. I think you'll like it. It's a ride." The old woman had already started up the steep steps. She went slowly with both hands on the stair rail. I got in the one seat and Craig got in the other.

"Scrunch close. It'll go. Push that button. OK!" The old man hobbled up the steps after us. I think of the movie "What Ever Happened to Baby Jane" and other sinister movie scenes with inclinors.

We get off the lift at the top of the steps as the old man reaches the landing. The old woman has already opened a massive wooden door with a large key. The old man gestures for me to go in first. Craig follows me and the old man follows Craig. The old woman has turned on some lamps but they are not necessary because the spacious room is filled with light from three enormous arched picture windows. The view is even more incredible than the view from downstairs. The apartment's exterior walls were exposed brick and are very thick. The interior walls that form the room dividers are the same oak paneling as was downstairs. A beautiful and worn oriental carpet is on the floor.

I realize that we haven't introduced ourselves so I do but the old couple doesn't reciprocate which I find odd. I notice that I'm speaking clearly and loudly. "This is a wonderful apartment." I say. "You must be very proud of your home. What a view! You can certainly watch the world from here."

"We like it. Donna, you sit in the red velvet chair; Craig, you sit in that blue sateen wingback; I'll sit on the left side of the couch" the old man directed us tactfully, cluing his blind wife onto our locations. She sat on the tapestry sofa next to the old man.

I see pictures of children on the fireplace mantle and ask if they are the grandchildren. We make small talk and the woman is directing the conversation now. She asks where we are from and what we do and occasionally has to repeat things for the old man who doesn't seem to hear as well now as he did earlier. Craig asks about the real estate business and the old man tells us he was an appraiser and speculator. "I did alright, yes sir, alright."

The woman asks us where we are staying and we tell her Hilton Head. Then the old man starts telling us about the time he had to do an appraisal on the south beach end of Hilton Head and he said "When I got to the house a big nigger comon outa that house and told me no whiteys allowed. Why I told that boy I could have him arrested for that kinda mouth, yessir Hilton has changed since then."

Craig and I look at each other. We are uncomfortable with this turn in the conversation. The old woman says to the old man "You haven't offered our guests any candy." She picks up a large box of candy from the table in front of her. She carefully removes the lid and the inner wrapping and hands it to Craig saying "Craig, would you care for some chocolate? Please hep yerself and pass it to Donna." I notice she uses our names often which makes us feel special but reinforces the fact that we don't know their names.

I take one small piece of candy and again dark thoughts invade my mind. I think maybe there is arsenic in

the candy. I feel foolish and eat the small piece anyway. I see Craig eating a piece and think well at least we'll go together. Craig set the candy box down on the table in front of the woman. She reaches towards him for the box so he picks it up again and sets it in her hands. She closes the box up as carefully as she opened it.

"We've lived here for twenty-nine years" the old man says. "Just two days ago we finished work on another house near Greenville. It's an odd house on top of a rocky mountain. Blasted out a chunk and then built on top. Course we haven't seen it. We've both been blind for a few years."

I say to the old woman "Your African violets are beautiful."

She replies "I'm so glad for you to say. I can't see 'em ya know." I describe the colors of the blossoms and she smiles. A silence follows that I want to fill but I don't know what else to say. I look at Craig and then I stand up.

"Thank you so much for sharing your home with us but we have an engagement tonight in Hilton Head. We must be going" I say as I walk toward the sofa and our hosts.

"Please sign our guest book and take a souvenir calendar" the old woman says. I am amazed. Guest book? I see the open book on the large dining room table. A fountain pen lies in the spine. I sign our names under a couple from Iowa. I realize that they do this all the time. These gentle, kind and far too trusting blind-deaf people invite strangers into their home on a regular basis. They seek the company of strangers and share their view and time.

"On your way out I'd like to show you the rest of the house if you will" the old man says.

"That would be lovely" I say. He proudly shows me their bedroom with its enormous canopied bed and wall of built-in drawers. Then he shows us the guest room with its high twin beds with turned mahogany posts.

At the door to the stairs he tells us "We sure enjoyed your company. Ride on down now, and let yourselves out. Byebye."

We get on the lift and ride down. We shout up from the bottom "Thank you for showing us your wonderful home."

"Our pleasure" he says and we shut the door out on the bright sidewalk.

Craig says "That was really weird!" We excitedly talk about our experience. I tell Craig about my misapprehensions and sinister imaginings. He says he was thinking the same things. He tells me he waited till I took a bite of the candy before he took a bite. We laugh and hold hands as we walk towards the street where our car is parked. We agree that it has been a wonderful spontaneous adventure for a couple of suspicious northerners in the alien "Old South."

## 12 Becoming More Observant

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For this next project, we need to introduce a few new terms. The first is ethnomethodology. This, despite the similarity of the term to ethnography and ethnoscience, is something quite different. Ethnomethodology is an effort to understand how we maintain a social reality, how we keep ourselves and others from sliding out of it into...something else.

The next idea is the social unconscious. Much – maybe most – of what is socially important is, in fact, a background to conscious experience. It is not easily available to the person who has grown up within this background, and may be missed in the techniques we've been discussing. I believe that this social background was, once upon a time, foreground – when the individual first had to learn the rules of basic social behavior. It is also available to the newcomer, the outsider, or the student of social realities. While you learn something, the theory goes, you will be conscious of it, however fleeting that conscious moment may be.

Attempting to be fully aware while learning social behaviors I call passing, though it could also be called "observant participation" or "hermeneutic role-playing." Millions of people throughout history have passed as something they were not: Jews passing as Gentiles, blacks passing as whites, men passing as women, and so on. It is they who are often most aware of the subtleties of Gentile, white, or female behavior. So, when you wish to understand the underlying social realities of some group of people, you might try to "pass" as one of them, to one degree or another.

There is, of course, an ethical problem here. It can be alleviated a bit by clarifying to the group that you are indeed an outsider (something that, in most cases, they figured out in the first five minutes!), but that you wish to become an insider. In passing, you not only observe and interact, you become.

As a class, learn to do a decent imitation of a dialect. Take notes on what it is that characterizes that dialect, as these characteristics are revealed in the learning process. Try a different dialect.

A secondary effect – maybe the primary one! – is your increased awareness of your own speech. You are likely to feel your tongue, mouth, lips, face...as you haven't before. We take so much for granted.

### 13 Experimental Phenomenology

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If you are interested in insights into a very specific phenomenon, one that doesn't happen often (or perhaps at all!), you might go so far as to create the phenomenon. You can do this by setting up a situation in which the phenomenon is very likely to occur.

One example is something done by ethologists. If you are studying the mating behaviors of stickleback fish, it certainly makes life easier if you can set up an aquarium with all the right conditions, rather than waiting in icy cold European streams for the little buggers to get going. After all, the fish don't seem to know they're in an aquarium. This way, you can introduce a male or female fish to another and record what happens, over and over again. You can even do nice "free variations" by introducing fish of other species or even little plastic fish of varying sizes and shapes.

Another example is the work of Piaget, and of those who have been influenced by him. He calls his method *la méthode clinique*: Give children specific problems to solve and carefully watch how they go about it. Note differences among children of different ages (or some other "classification variable") and you have a valuable – yet non-experimental – contribution to the field.

We also find this technique among the early social psychologists, revealing their Gestalt roots. Asch's conformity experiment or Sherif's autokinetic and boy's camp studies, for example, weren't true experiments. They were situations, reactions to which were carefully recorded.

The final example is Garfinkeling, after the ethnomethodologist Harold Garfinkel. It could be characterized as "experimental participant observation." In order to make evident the underlying background social understandings we share, he suggests simply breaking the rules, doing what does not come naturally. For example, in a busy restaurant, get up and help the waiters and waitresses, take orders from people, explaining you are only trying to help out, and so on. See what happens. Note the looks on people's faces. Note the speed with which you are escorted out of the restaurant. Free variation, live!

Garfinkel had his students go home to their families and do a very simple thing: Play the part of the perfect son or daughter. Ask politely for things you have been helping yourself to for years. Make your bed. Make other people's beds. They found that their parents were, if anything, frightened by this behavior. It is, quite literally, as if there were an imposter in the house. Garfinkel had to stop doing many of his favorite exercises simply because they were too threatening to people: You were taking away their social background, their foundation for reality.

There is, of course, a criticism to be made regarding "experimental phenomenology" (by whatever name): We are introducing the very artificialities that we criticize traditional methods of having, and come up against some of the same ethical questions. The gains must be weighed against the costs.

This project involves "mirror-writing." You will need a small mirror, a piece of cardboard, and paper and pencil or pen. With a partner holding the piece of cardboard to shield your view of your hand, try to write while looking only in the mirror. Write whatever comes to mind – the Gettysburg Address, the Lord's Prayer, "To be or not to be..." or whatever. Make the letters and words look right in the mirror. (They will be upside down and backwards on the paper.) Keep your attention on the mirror image of your hand, the pencil, and the marks on the paper. Tell your partner what you are going through:

- What are you conscious of?
- What is your focus?
- Where are your tensions?
- What were the hardest things?
- The easiest?
- How does it get easier?
- What's happening to you that makes it easier?
- How's your self esteem holding up?

Then change places with your partner.

You might want to reflect on your first grade experiences: starting letters at the right spot, reversing letters, staying in the lines.... Note why kids need lots of recess time!

If you don't have a mirror handy, you can get the same effect by trying to write backwards or upside down, or by switching to your non-dominant hand.

You can also investigate "learning to read:" After you've written things, let your partner try reading them. Note the way the words slowly become "legible" – first as composites of strange letters, later as whole words or phrases that "speak" to you. Or just try reading upside down or in a mirror.

# Part Four:

# Interviewing

## 14 Nondirective Interviewing

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As already suggested earlier, when we developed an "ethnomusicology," sometimes the best thing to do is to ask. Interviewing is the mainstay of many different kinds of qualitative method, from case studies to ethnography.

For this project, find someone slightly different from yourself and interview this person. Ask them for an hour or two of their time; explain what you are doing and ask their permission to record the interview. If you have a taperecorder, you may use it if they don't mind. Otherwise, take notes – minimal ones that don't interfere with the flow of the conversation; later, you can sit down by yourself and "fill in the blanks." Even if you do use a taperecorder, you might want to try this to sharpen your recording and remembering skills!

You are to pick a topic that might interest both you and your interviewee. Make it a value question, something the person will have an opinion on, something concerning judgements of good and bad.

This is to be an unstructured interview. This means that, although you may interact with the person – ask questions, ask for detail, for clarification, and so on – you should avoid, as much as possible, forcing the person in any direction, other than keeping their attention on the original topic. In other words, back off and let them express themselves.

Summarize the conversation in approximately four pages, paraphrasing or using the person's own words where they are most effective, using your own words otherwise. Communicate to the prospective reader what the person was expressing! You will – necessarily, I think – need to use your "empathy" or "intuition" to do this. but take great care not to put your ideas into his or her mouth.

One outstanding technique for the unstructured interview is what Carl Rogers (1951) called reflection: To get more detail or additional insight, especially when you sense uncertainty in the person, rephrase what they have been telling you and put it in the form of a question. If they tell you, for example, that life sucks, a difficult phrase to interpret, come back with "life has been getting you down lately?" A question like his says to them (1) I need more to go on, (2) I care about what you have to say, and (3) I respect you enough not to force you. It takes a lot of practice to get this right – essentially, it must come from you honestly – so don't overwork it at first. The most common mistake is to rephrase every other comment, which makes you sound like a parrot with a psychology degree (and may cost you your interviewee's trust).

When you finish writing up your interview, reread it and ask yourself these questions:

1. Was I fully present, phenomenologically? Or did I sink into routine, a sort of semi-conscious scribbling?
2. If I was fully present, did I nevertheless take care not to allow my own desires, interests, needs, or thoughts to distort the interview?
3. How was my "esthetic" sense? Did I see the patterns or essences? Did I communicate them to the reader as the interviewee would have wanted me to? Did I check my intuitions with the person by reflection or by simply asking?
4. Did I capture the person as well as the topic? Did I capture the conversation, the flow of words and ideas between two real people in a real setting?

Discuss your interviews in class.

## A Student's Interview

Topic Choice:

"What does it mean to be a Christian?"

I do not refer to the majority of us who are not Jewish, Moslem, etc. I am interested in the highly emotional, highly convinced subgroup sometimes referred to as the "charismatics."

Statement of biases:

I grew up in a theologically/philosophically sophisticated home environment. My father has published a number of writings regarding religious matters in the Catholic Church and is a consultant for the American Council of Bishops. Professors, bishops, even two cardinals were/are visitors frequently and conversed with my father into the morning hours. I went to a Catholic high school and received an excellent religious education.

Perhaps I am subtly rebelling by my present agnostic/secular humanist stance. I know for sure that I had to fight the tendency to debate the merit of religiosity during the interview. I struggled to check my bias of religion-as-childish at all moments.

Explanation of technique:

My first step in the interview was to clarify to my informant the nature of my technique. I made it clear that I was the student and she (Tracey) was the teacher. I explained the techniques of reflection and open questioning as well as non-judgementalness. She seemed to be quite flattered and was eager to commence the interview.

Body of the interview:

After posing my initiating question to Tracey ("What does it mean to be a Christian?"), I learned the following: There is a "special" feeling that comes with a "special" relationship with God. There is feeling of change when one is converted—a feeling of rising above the crowd.

Tracey was very careful to note that God loved her no more than any other human. In her words: "God gets as close to humans as he can on his own. Then he will call each of us to step forward from our own free will... Some come, others don't... (but when) we take those few steps that we have the power to take, we become 'more special' in his eyes...."

She explained that Christians were given an "inner glow" as a gift. At this point I asked her to tell me more about an "inner glow." She said that an inner glow was a happy feeling or a special sort of energy. It was a feeling much like one feels before something good is about to happen. It was much "...like (how she) felt on the night before Christmas when (she) was young...." She felt loved by someone who was "all powerful and all knowing." It seemed like she had sided with a true champion.

Tracey may have startled herself by using the term "more special" (as I have quoted above) because I sensed a growing need for self-explanation at this point. She explained that she was no better than anyone else. In fact she "... was more of a servant now than ever..." and she cited examples from the bible that Christ himself washed his followers' feet and even died a horrible death in our service.

It is in serving that she sees the purpose of the "inner glow" previously referred to and the meaning of being a Christian. The "glow" is given with the following stipulation: it has to be shared. It is her duty, she believes, to make others as happy as she is. Tracey shares the feeling by encouraging others in all of their

endeavors and to remind them that God loves them (if they are receptive to religious sentiments). She also believes she can spread happiness to others by praying for them. Prayer also "...rekindles the fire in her heart, especially communal prayer...."

Tracey seemed to become a little defensive for some reason at the possibility that I may think she was boasting. She insisted that it was not she or through her merits that she can do all this good. Her only outstanding merit was that she opened her heart to the Holy Spirit for him to work through her.

The interview ended at this point with a mild suggestion that I develop my own spirituality because she gets good "vibes" from me. She then went on her way to class.

Post-check:

I gave this protocol to her to read and she agreed with the majority of the transcription—it was an accurate portrayal of the transaction, or at least acceptable.

(Note: Tracey is a pseudonym.)

## 15 Being Aware of Your Biases

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Bracketing is possibly more important when doing interviews than in other qualitative methods. It's also more difficult.

Like so many things, bracketing is something you must learn through experience: By "keeping your eyes open," by being hard on yourself, by working with others, you will become sensitive to the intrusion of biases into your descriptions. However, we can get a start on developing this sensitivity with a "simple" homework exercise:

First, make a list of your characteristics:

1. your gender;
2. your age;
3. your ethnic or national identification;
4. your religion or philosophy of life;
5. your political party or orientation;
6. your favorite psychological theory.

And four more characteristics: words or phrases that are descriptive of you as an individual.

It is likely that these ten characteristics will be at the roots of your more obvious biases; that they will underlie the ethnocentric and egocentric tendencies that we all have. And that is the second part of this exercise:

1. List ways in which your characteristics might bias you in your efforts at research interviewing.
2. Then write how you might counteract these biases.
3. And then write how these efforts to counteract your biases might themselves lead to other biases!

Push yourself! Some of the biases may surprise you. Share them with the rest of the class. Remember, though, that bracketing is much more than just being aware of your biases; it is a special openness to what is there. I don't know of any simple exercises for that!

## 16 Interviewing As Dialog

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For this project, I want you to find a friend who is different from yourself in some way, and interview him or her about those very differences.

Begin by asking them for an hour or two of their time (you may well find yourself needing and wanting more), explain your purposes, and ask if they mind if you record the conversation (tape or paper and pencil). If you tape the conversation, still have the paper and pencil handy to record non-verbal happenings or thoughts that occur to you during the interview.

This will be a dialog: Relate to your informant as a co-researcher. For example, you might use what happens in the conversation as topics for the conversation: "I find myself avoiding looking at your eyes – did you notice? Do you feel the same way?"

Be careful of imposing yourself to much. Keep your focus, and your co-researcher's focus, on the problem of your differences, but don't put your ideas above theirs, don't put words in their mouths, don't force them into a position that is not in fact their position.

You may feel uncomfortable. Try to understand the discomfort. But remain open to the other person. Do not aim to resolve all your differences – you are not expected to convert. Neither should you pressure your co-researcher to come to your point-of-view – you are not to convert him or her. If they should want to end the interview, please respect that desire. Remember: You are the beneficiary of this interaction; treat your informant as your benefactor.

Discuss the interviews in class.

## Alcohol

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For the second interview I conducted, I chose to question a friend of mine that had only been back in town a few days. We went out to eat and then retired to my house to talk. Throughout the interview, I will refer to her as "Kate." Kate is a young woman in her late twenties. She grew up in Pennsylvania and later moved to a mid-western state after she married her high school sweetheart. Kate is very comfortable with speaking about any subject, so we got started right away.

For the most part, Kate lived a very normal and happy childhood. She had a wonderful mother and father, and two caring brothers. her father had a full time job and her mother occasionally worked at the supermarket in town. She was the youngest of the three children, so she was quite spoiled as a child. The family lived in an average looking house, with the two boys sharing a bedroom, leaving Kate to have her own. Everyone had their own set of chores to do, but homework always came first.

Kate believes that her parents started out to be a happy couple. Kate's mother was not one for public affection, so Kate hardly ever saw her parents hug or kiss. If Kate did happen to walk in on a stolen moment, her mother would push her father away as if he had violated her. Affection toward the children was different. Kate and her brothers were always being squeezed and kissed by both parents. Kate figured that her parents just did not think public displays of "lusty" affection were appropriate, especially in front of children.

As Kate grew older, she realized that the relationship her parents had was not so perfect. Kate's father used to leave late at night saying that he had to run to the grocery store or pick something up at the office or meet a friend for a drink. Being a small child, Kate never thought to second guess her father. However, as a preteen, she often stayed up late at night to wait for her father. One night when her father did not come home, Kate walked out to the garage, only to find her father sleeping in the back of his truck. Kate never asked why... she figured it was none of her business.

Kate explained that she had always been Daddy's girl. Her mother was more strict than her father, and Kate knew exactly how to get her father to say "yes." While growing up, Kate's brothers would try the same

tricks, but would never succeed. After years of trying, her brothers gave up and began to sabotage Kate's efforts. This continued for only a short time until the boys realized that it was no use.

The fighting between Kate's parents intensified. The quiet little fights late at night in her parents' bedroom turned into loud voice battles that took place wherever, regardless of where the children were. Kate's mother often threw things, screamed, and ran out of the room, leaving Kate's father standing alone with his hand to his face. Occasionally, after a particularly bad fight, Kate would run and hug her father and tell him that things would be alright. He would hold her in disbelief.

At some point during Kate's sophomore year in high school, her parents moved into separate rooms. Her mother stayed in the bedroom, and her father slept on the couch in the den. Sometimes, Kate would finish her homework early and fall asleep in the den watching basketball with her father. If her mother ever found her in the den in the morning, she would accuse Kate of horrible things. The accusation would start another fight between her parents, and Kate would run out crying.

Kate found herself trying to avoid her mother at all costs. For awhile, Kate managed to steer clear of her mother until one day. One afternoon after returning home from school in her junior year, Kate walked into the living room to find her mother sprawled on the couch holding a bottle of vodka. Kate's mother screamed at her and then screamed for Kate's father to come downstairs and get Kate out of the room. Kate's father came running down the stairs and grabbed Kate's arm and pulled her into the kitchen. Kate was shaking and crying while her father tried to explain that her mother had a bad day and just needed to be alone. Kate ran out the door and did not come home until late that night.

During her time away, Kate had figured out the big mystery. All these years, her mother had been an alcoholic, a drunk, and Kate's father had worked hard to hide it from his children. All these years, her mother's addiction had been tearing the family apart while her father suffered the most pain. Kate had had enough. She stormed into her mother's room screaming and accusing. Meanwhile, her youngest brother had heard the racket and ran to his mother's room. He accused Kate of being the family-wrecker and screamed at her to get out.

Kate grabbed a few things and went to stay at a friend's house for a couple of days. Kate's father moved out of the house as well and left Kate's mother to pick up the pieces. When Kate returned a few weeks later to retrieve the rest of her things, her mother was still drinking and still blaming Kate. When Kate left, she went to live with her father. A few days after graduating from high school, Kate married her boyfriend and they moved far away from her mother. Kate still keeps in touch with her father and one of her brothers. Rumor has it that her mother has started to clean up her act and move on with her life with her youngest son as her only family.

This might seem like a narrative story, but Kate felt that the only way to express her feelings about alcohol and drinking was to tell the story that caused her to form such strong negative opinions.

Kate feels that drinking is unnecessary for anyone. Throughout school, Kate had always been tempted, but her father's teachings had kept her strong. Even in the social setting, Kate never took a drink. Instead, she would order a seltzer or a glass of tea. She gets chills every time she reads stories in the newspaper about alcoholic parents beating their children and about college students drinking themselves to death. Kate has often thought about joining an organization to help herself and others in her situation. She says that will probably never happen, because she just wants to put that part of her life behind her.

Kate believes that people do not know what the signs for alcoholism are. She lived with an alcoholic for a long time and never knew it. She wants everyone to know that alcoholism can be quiet. The victims do not have to be poor or stupid or mean. The disease can affect anyone. For some time, Kate looked into her mother's family history to try to blame it on someone else besides her mother. But Kate's mother had good parents who were not alcoholics. Kate, like most children who face alcoholic parents, desperately wanted to find a way to forgive her mother and make things better. However, that was almost impossible, at least for right now.

Kate does not believe that any type of alcohol consumption is safe. In her mother's case, the consumption

was obviously harmful, as anyone could have easily determined if all the facts had been known. But even a social drink can turn into a disaster. One social drink might lead to another and cause a rational person to do things he or she would not normally do. Alcohol can cause accidents and outcomes that are disastrous. The problem is that nobody knows when the accident will happen, or how many drinks is too many, or what type of behavior constitutes alcoholism. People do not learn from other people's mistakes. The phrase "it won't happen to me" has been used too often with certainty that can not be known.

The interview ended here because Kate did not want to discuss the topic any further. She was not emotional, but she felt that we exhausted the topic as far as she was concerned. We both agreed that the next time we talk, it should be about a subject that is not so personal. In a way, I felt as if I was invading her privacy even though she had agreed to be part of the interview.

## 17 Focus Groups

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One of the most popular techniques today is the group interview, better known as the focus group. The idea is very simple: Instead of interviewing one person at a time, get a group of people of one sort or another, and discuss some topic of interest.

When done in a phenomenological fashion, focus groups can be quite revealing. Unfortunately, focus groups are quite popular among researchers with strong ideological predispositions. Because of the dynamics of groups, if you discuss something that has great emotional meaning for you, it is quite likely that you will steer the group to express precisely what you had in mind. This might seem marvelous from the researcher's point-of-view – what other technique is so self-validating? – but it is clearly not honest.

People with strong interests in women's or men's issues, religious issues, political issues, labor-management issues, and so on, easily fall victim to this little bit of self-delusion. Keep in mind that, the more ego-involved you are in something, the less likely it is that you will be aware of your biases! Like with so many qualitative methods, everybody thinks they can do it, and do it well. As you know by now, that just isn't true. If anything, the more confidence a person has in their abilities to be unbiased, the less I trust them! A good researcher is always questioning his or her skills.

There are other pitfalls as well: Groups are often dominated by strong personalities; Groups can generate more emotion than any one individual might feel about the issue; Groups can focus in so tightly on one issue that they can't think of any others; Groups often appear more consistent than they are because individuals who don't agree don't want to disturb the peace; and so on and so forth. Particularly when issues are "hot" and group cohesion is strong, focus groups can degenerate into something resembling an afternoon talk show.

But if the researcher is well-trained and open-minded, focus groups are a good research tool. They are especially appropriate for beginning an investigation, for example, into how a company runs or into the dynamics of a social club. They are often used in consultation work.

For a project, try organizing your class into a focus group. Discuss something controversial and emotional, just to see what happens!

## Summary Of Psychology Graduate Student Interviews

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On March 2, 1995, I interviewed a total of eleven Psychology graduate students – seven in one group, four in a second (with one attending both), and one independently. I asked open-ended questions such as "What do you like about our program," "What do you dislike," and "What suggestions do you have for improving our program," plus a number of follow-up and encouragement questions. I also asked for some details concerning their individual situations and progress.

To alert you to potential distortions, let me acknowledge several biases: I am skeptical of the graduate program's quality; I have found the graduate students to be pleasant and well-motivated and fairly intelligent; I have a decided bias against the experimental approach, and for phenomenological-existential alternatives. I am sure there are many more, but these are the ones I believe might most impact this study.

I have organized the results of my interviews by broad topics. Simple statements reflect the opinions of the majority of the students. Where the opinions are of the minority or an individual, I so specify, with some indication of the "dynamics" involved.

## Courses

There was generous praise for the quality of our teaching. It was mentioned that we have an "interesting" variety of personalities and styles, but that most of us seem fully involved in our field and interested in our students. We are apparently good at explaining things and particularly open to questions. The amount of material we cover was compared positively to other schools – one person saying that she learned more in her two years with us than four years in a biology program.

They particularly like the smaller, seminar-style courses, which provide more opportunity to get to know professors and fellow-grads as well as a greater understanding of the field.

The number one problem is the number of courses available. This problem has two sides. The first is that there are not enough options available each semester. For example, while Life Span is offered every semester, Group Dynamics and Tests and Measures are seldom or never offered. This is in conflict with our advertising. Further, the scheduling seems to change from year to year, so if you wait with a course because it conflicts with another, it may conflict with yet another course the following year. Summer courses in particular tended to be sparse and offered at overlapping times.

Although one full-time student would like more day courses, most need night courses because of work. The biggest scheduling problem seems to be that the History and Systems course, now a requirement, is not offered at night. Several said they had no idea how they would handle that. They also would like summer courses offered at night.

They suggested a consistent schedule with every course offered at least once a year. If student numbers are a problem, they suggested we recruit more students.

The second side of this problem is the actual number of different courses we offer. They considered this to be the more serious issue. Specifically mentioned were two broad areas, Industrial-Organizational and Clinical-Counseling. They pointed out that these were the two areas most of them intended to work in. Many students intend to go on to a PhD in clinical-counseling and felt that a few courses would help prepare them for their PhD programs. Specifically mentioned were courses in Abnormal, Family Psychology, and Theories of Counseling.

I pointed out our ethical concerns, but they felt those concerns were misplaced. First, the courses mentioned are not practicum courses. Second, no one had any intention of going into practice without further education and appropriate certification. Third, if anyone were unethical enough to "hang up a shingle" with only our Masters program, they could do so with or without these courses – the latter being even more dangerous.

A smaller number of students, with more immediate employment intentions, felt that a small selection of I-O courses would be wonderful, particularly in the personnel area. A testing course was mentioned. It is important to note, I think, that students with no career interest in Clinical or I-O strongly supported the addition of appropriate courses, in that they would add to their breadth of knowledge.

Two students intending to go into physiological PhD work expressed an interest in more physiological courses. One person mentioned an interest in courses in computers and legal psychology. On the other hand, it was generally felt that there were enough developmental and cognitive courses.

Mentioned often was their hope for more Special Topics presented by different professors at least once a year and/or during the summer. They were particularly interested in knowing "what profs were into." They suggested that we tell grads that they "sign-up or the course won't go" – i.e. apply a little pressure by putting the responsibility on them!

A third issue concerns scheduling. Many expressed their need to know course offerings far in advance in order to arrange their schedules. A couple knew that the secretary had future semester schedules available, which led others to suggest that we print them up or post them somewhere, even if it was to be understood that these schedules were tentative.

Even better would be a consistent schedule that carried from year to year. Several were surprised to hear that

I teach Personality every Fall, as they were unaware of this regularity. A brochure with a list of all the courses, who teaches them, and when they are offered would be appreciated. Best would be that even the times at which they were offered would be consistent from semester to semester.

The students complained of the "hierarchy of values" regarding types of research. They would like more information about qualitative methods. They suggested that either RDS be optional or qualitative methods should be made an equal requirement. Their rationale was that few intended to make research a priority, and although they would need RDS for their PhD work and to be good consumers, qualitative methods were far more relevant to their interests.

Concerning this issue, they expressed annoyance at requirements generally. They saw themselves as adults capable of making their own choices, and of taking responsibility even if they made poor choices. They disliked the "you don't know what's good for you" attitude implied.

Most felt that some classes were too large. Specifically mentioned were History and Systems, Life Span, Sensation and Perception, and Qualitative Methods. They didn't feel it was too great a problem in content-oriented classes such as S-P, but that it was bad in discussion classes such as H-S.

When I pointed out that three of these were 400 level courses and the other a "service" course, they understood the problem but made specific complaints about H-S: There are often undergrads in H-S that not only do not participate but are disruptive. There was unanimous support for the idea of a 500-level H-S class (offered at night). It was pointed out that our requiring H-S at this time prevents them from taking more than two additional 400-level courses. When it was suggested that H-S be made optional, they responded with support for our policy (in spite of their desire for more autonomy!).

One person brought up an interesting problem: Full-time students can get a full-time assistantship, which they may have difficulty handling, while part-time students, who could handle a full-time assistantship, are only allowed a part-time one!

## Interaction

Perhaps the most consistent praise our department received from these students was the quality of student-professor interaction. We are apparently always willing to talk and good at listening. They perceived nearly all of us as friendly, open, flexible, and concerned with their welfare. They were particularly impressed by those of us who invite students to their homes. Among one person's comments: "You are not just profs;" "We don't have to be afraid to say how we feel or to have a different point-of-view;" "You treat us like adults." Others felt that it was possible to develop a real relationship with a professor here. A couple of them, however, wanted to know how to do this! One in particular noted that he was half-way through the program before he first met his advisor, and a few others agreed.

They would like to get to know us better, though, especially early on. One suggestion was to have an introductory meeting where each professor would give an overview of his or her interests and research. The little orientation luncheon we give is greatly appreciated, but they want each of us to give a presentation on ourselves. At least we should have a full description in a brochure for the grad students. Several wanted to go a step further and have research colloquia every two or three months. When I described our old Spring mini-conference, they seemed quite enthusiastic.

More than one noted that being a graduate assistant in the department was very helpful in getting to know professors and fellow students.

Interaction among graduate students, unfortunately, was another matter. Many indicated a desire to get to know other students, for reasons such as studying together, sharing information about courses, professors, thesis, and career preparation, and just for comradery's sake.

It was felt that there was little collegiality among the grads, that they didn't get together to study or to relax. A student pointed out that in some schools the "older" students help the "younger" ones, something she felt would be valuable here as well.

The small classes helped a little, since they could get to know each other there when time allowed. They particularly liked classes with group work. They noted, though, that the relationships stop when the class stops.

A major desire was for a regular grad student get-together, perhaps three times each semester. They suggested that we "just do it," that people will catch on and it will become routine. Particular suggestions included advertising well and holding it on class nights, 4:30 to 5:30 or so, and having food available (pizza was mentioned most frequently, at the students' own expense) since some would otherwise not have time to eat between work and class. Each meeting would have a different focus, addressing such issues as PhD programs, thesis planning, career possibilities, professors' research, etc.

One person suggested a formal graduate student-faculty association in order to "promote the career of the major."

### Advisement

Most of the students felt a real need for better advisement. First, they would like a better introduction to the department, its faculty, its facilities, its requirements. Commuter students especially felt this need. Some suggested that the college has tours for new grads, but most were unaware of them. This led to the suggestion that we should also try to make grads aware earlier of facilities outside the department. For example, while most were dismayed by our limited computers, few knew there was a sizable lab with nice new Macs right next door in Horton!

A much more serious need was for information about what one can do with a Masters. They suggested that we have a person, or minimally a bookshelf, that has such information. About one quarter of the students I spoke to were "terminal Masters," and others were interested in the information in the event that they had difficulty getting into a PhD program. Several mentioned that some profs had a "bad attitude" about the value of the masters and the quality of the school, and that this did not help them.

About three quarters said they were using our program as a "way station" towards a PhD Others also said they wanted to keep their options open. They felt fairly optimistic, noting that PhD programs seemed to be interested in us, and seemed to accept most of our courses, as well as our thesis, according to their sources. They appreciated those of us who have networks of relations in other programs.

They would like information on how to get into a PhD program. Some noted how a faculty member served as an "advocate" for them, and others wanted to know how to develop such a relationship. Again, they wanted to know more about the faculty, to find out who could, and would, help them in this regard.

They felt that we should try to match students with professors in terms of interests. Perhaps we could have them fill out a questionnaire concerning interests which would then be used to make a match. Few were aware that they could switch advisors at all, much less easily.

There was a strong need for better a explanation of the thesis. Few realized (until it was too late) that you should begin thinking about your thesis long before you sign up for your first thesis hours. They would like a pamphlet that explains the process, as well as listing the faculty's research interests. They also wanted to know how relevant the thesis was to getting into a PhD program.

As one person put it, they need to know "the administrative business."

Dropping candidacy was thought a good idea.

## Facilities

The students like Gilbert Hall for its quaint coziness. The praise stops there.

The most commonly expressed need was for computers. They compared our department negatively to other schools (specifically mentioned were Bloomsburg and Penn State at Harrisburg). Most who commented said they used Macs. They also wanted more applications, though they could not tell me off-hand what. One suggested that the faculty donate their computers to the students and get new ones for themselves. When I told him that I just this year went from an Apple II to a Mac Plus, he withdrew his suggestion. Another suggestion was to contact former grads for donations.

Two students with serious experimental interests indicated a need for better and larger laboratory space.

The favorite classroom was the seminar room. They would very much like more rooms like it. Our upstairs classrooms get very low marks for their "undergrad," "authoritarian," and "run down" feel. Small desks were mentioned as a complaint by several larger graduate students. (As a large person myself, I can vouch for the fact that sitting in one of those desks through a night class is tantamount to cruel and unusual punishment. I am serious about this.)

A coffee-maker was requested.

The only time I had to halt discussion was when someone brought up parking and things got entirely out of hand. Apparently, parking is even more difficult for graduate students than for the rest of us. It seems that it is a major reason for no-one coming in during the day-time, if they can avoid it. They often park behind Heiges. This is a real problem for people who work full-time, go to school full-time, and care for their families full-time! Suggestions included being permitted to purchase faculty stickers, having the power plant lot open to them, and getting special permission to park where they otherwise could not.

They told me that "parking is horrendous" and that the administration should be made to understand that it is not a "joke" issue. It reflects on the respect the college shows its students (and, if I might add an editorial note, its faculty).

## Other comments

The students were generally happy with the size of our program, department, and school. They felt that it allowed for better relations with professors and more potential for personalizing their studies. They mentioned that they liked the fact that the program was "open-ended" and that they could do anything that interested them. They liked the "general" nature of the program, and felt that it was a great opportunity to test themselves in terms of readiness for further education and to try research and the thesis. In other words, despite the large number of criticisms and suggestions, they considered this a good program.

When I asked how they came to know about our program, the responses were fairly consistent: They had heard about us from a friend, relative, or undergrad professor. The major considerations that made us a good choice for them were our location (usually based on a one hour travel radius), our affordability, and the fact that we seem to be the only college offering a general Masters in the state.

All the students felt that the "focus group" was an excellent idea.

I was quite impressed with these students. Although one seemed rather cynical and another somewhat naive, all were enthusiastic about psychology and pleased to participate in anything to help the program. They were also thoughtful and articulate. I came away from this experience with a sense that this program is, in fact, well worth saving, and this population of students worth serving.

[A description of the students and a summary of suggestions followed]

**Part Five:**  
**Other Techniques and Conclusion**

## 18 The Personal Construction of Reality

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It has been some time since we last looked at a particular phenomenon, such as a particular experience with cranberry juice. Yet one of the most interesting things to study is a particular phenomenon: The individual human being, the person or personality or, as George Kelly puts it, the personal construction of reality.

So, we have developed methods to get at that personal construction. One common technique is testing. Unfortunately, most testing involves the predetermination of the dimensions of measurement by the researcher. We have tests that look for introversion- extraversion, for androgeny, for ego-strength, for stage of moral development, and so on. These tests don't respect the person's unique point-of-view.

(You can't help but notice this problem when you come across a "forced choice" question that you want a middle version for, or are asked to rate something on a five-point scale and notice that "I don't know" and "moderately" are both scored as a three!)

There have been a number of attempts to get a more "subjective" picture of the person:

### **Semantic differential.**

Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957) invented the semantic differential with the idea that, by extracting the patterns in people's responses to large numbers of items with techniques such as factor analysis, we can avoid force-fitting them into our own favorite categories. Essentially, people are asked to rate a concept – father, ideal self, nation... – on a long list of adjective pairs, using a seven-point scale. Unfortunately, the research quickly came up with three dimensions that best accounted for the answers not of individuals, but of large masses of people. We are then asked to rate individuals against these three dimensions. This is simply a "democratic" way of arriving at the same predetermined categories that others derive by more dictatorial methods. Similar techniques were developed by Eysenck and Cattell, and the same criticisms apply.

### **Q-sort.**

Invented by Stephenson (1953) and made famous by Carl Rogers, the Q-sort involves the use of 100 cards, each with a different statement about personality, attitudes, preferences and the like. The client or subject is asked to sort these cards into piles ranging from "very characteristic of me" to "not characteristic of me." The usual technique involves a forced sort, i.e. putting precisely so many cards into a pile so as to form a normal distribution: Pile "0" gets 2 cards, "1" gets 4, "2" gets 6, "3" gets 12, "4" gets 16, "5" gets 20, "6" gets 16, "7" gets 12, "8" gets 6, "9" gets 4, and "10" gets 2. The most common use is to compare distributions before and after therapy or experimental intervention. But you see the criticisms coming: Who wrote the 100 statements? Do we think in 11 categories of evaluation? Do we arrange our evaluations into normal curves?

### **Twenty statements test.**

"Twenty statements" (Kuhn and McPartland, 1954) was invented by Manfred Kuhn, a symbolic interactionist, and is probably the simplest technique in the history of testing: Ask the person for twenty answers to the question "Who am I?" This comes as close as we could want to a test that respects the person (especially considering that twenty does not seem a restrictive number – most people stop short of that number!). The problems are somewhat different from the ones we have been mentioning: It is less useful for topics other than self-image; it is difficult to make comparisons between people; it changes each time we give it to the person.

### The role construct repertory test.

Also known as the rep grid, it was invented in the 1950's by George Kelly (1955). It is a technique for discovering the way in which a person interprets (construes, constructs) his or her reality. More specifically, it elicits the constructs – contrasts, dimensions – with which the person "cuts up" the otherwise seamless world. It is very respectful of the person's perspective. But it is a technique which does not require the talent and experience that the phenomenological or hermeneutic methods require: It is pleasantly egalitarian, and will be our topic for the next project.

### The REP Grid

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To make it "egalitarian," Kelly had to substitute technique (and later technology) for insight. So the rep grid will require considerable explanation.

Look at these three words:

Cat Wolf Dog

Can you think of a way in which two of these are like each other and different from the third? Try these three words:

Mother Father Self

This process of asking a person to look at a trio of words and pick out two which are similar and one which is different is called construct elicitation. The words are called elements and should refer to unique individual events or simple classes of events. The way in which two are similar and the other different is called the construct. It does in fact include both ends of the dimension, i.e. the similarity and the difference. Note that the constructs are provided by the "subject," not the researcher, i.e. the rep grid greatly respects the subject's understanding.

Take a look at the grid on the next page. First, write down your elements: Besides yourself, list eight people you know – half of them ones you like a bit, half ones you dislike a bit. Make sure they are real people in your life, and don't use them more than once. Don't be afraid to change your mind at this point – you can't do it later!

Note that the elements can be almost anything. However, things will work best if you stick to a few simple rules:

1. The elements should be concrete – people, objects, events, activities, etc., and not abstractions.
2. The elements should be discrete, not overlapping (as you would get if you used adjectives, for example).
3. The elements should be homogenous, i.e. within some broad category. Don't, for example, mix up people with things.

Then look below in the grid and you will see three circles in every row (left-to-right). These are the three to "compare and contrast." Put an x or check-mark in the two you feel are most similar and leave the third empty (or put some other mark there, if you prefer). Then write how the two you x-ed are similar in the space next to that row, and write how the third person is different in the space next to that one. This is your first construct. Then do the same for the next set of three and so on. You may repeat yourself when new constructs don't occur to you. Try to avoid using the obvious, physical characteristics (male-female, for

example), as this example of the rep grid is intended to get at your psychological constructs.

One could stop at this point with a nice list of constructs to talk about. One could also go a lot further: Go back and place all the other elements (the ones not in circles) on one end or the other of each construct – i.e. go across the first row and judge all the other elements against the first construct: If they match the two x-ed ones, x them too; if they match the other one, leave them blank.

Note: Sometimes a construct is not relevant to an element. For example, the construct "Protestant-Catholic" is not relevant to a Jewish element. You may put "N.A." or "0" in the space. However, you may want to ask yourself if you wouldn't like to split the construct – for example, the "Protestant-Catholic" could be understood as an abbreviation for "Protestant-nonprotestant" and "Catholic-noncatholic."

Another note: Kelly started with a "two point" scale, that is, with x's and blanks. You can use other degrees of discrimination: three, five, seven, and nine points, even 100 points and line-division have been used – especially in computer-assisted versions of the rep grid. A number of researchers have come to feel that five is the most useful number.

By looking over the grid, you may see that two constructs match up, that is, each person who is "x-ed" in one is "x-ed" in the other, and the same for the blanks. This means that the two constructs are at least being used in a similar fashion, and may, in fact, be identical. Likewise, if two constructs don't match in any case, that means that they are also possibly identical, but are reversed (the similarity pole on one being the contrast pole on the other, and vice versa).

### Grid Analysis

Grid analysis, also called focussing, is the most time-consuming aspect of grid work. Take the following full grid (examples adapted from Stewart, Stewart, and Fonda, 1981):

	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5
C1		X	X	X	
C2	X		X		X
C3		X		X	
C4	X	X		X	X
C5			X		

(E's represent the elements, and C's the constructs.) First compare each column with each other column, e.g.:

	E1	E2	
C1		X	0
C2	X		0
C3		X	0
C4	X	X	MATCH
C5			MATCH
		TOTAL:	2 MATCHES

Continue this with all other combinations and organize your totals into a matrix of element-similarities:

	E2	E3	E4	E5
E1	2	2	2	5
E2		1	5	2
E3			1	2
E4				2

Now reorganize the grid by grouping together the columns by how similar they are:

	E3	E1	E5	E2	E4
C1	X			X	X
C2	X	X	X		
C3				X	X
C4		X	X	X	X
C5	X				

Note that E1 and E5 are identical, as are E2 and E4; These two groups share two points of commonality; E1 and E5 share two points with E3; E2 and E4 share only one point with E3; hence the arrangement and the lines. Now, repeat this whole process for the constructs!

	C2	C3	C4	C5
C1	1	4	2	3
C2		0	2	3
C3			3	2
C4				0

But notice the cases of zero overlap, for example:

	E3	E1	E5	E2	E4
C2	X	X	X		
C3				X	X

If we had reversed one of the two constructs (for example, had phrased it as "bad-good" instead of "good-bad") we would have had a perfect match:

	E3	E1	E5	E2	E4
C2-REV				X	X
C3				X	X

(The REV stands for reversed.) With five elements, a score of zero or one (two is borderline) would suggest reversal. So: C2 looks like it has collected some low scores (1, 0, 2, 3) and C4 is borderline (2, 2, 3, 0). Let's try reversing them:

	E3	E1	E5	E2	E4
C1	X			X	X
C2-REV				X	X
C3				X	X
C4-REV	X				
C5	X				

Now:

	C2-REV	C3	C4-REV	C5
C1	4	4	5	3
C2-REV		5	4	2
C3			4	2
C4-REV				3

And we could reorganize:

	E3	E1	E5	E2	E4
C4-REV	X				
C5	X				
C1	X			X	X
C2-REV				X	X
C3				X	X

Obviously, this quickly becomes unwieldy, especially with five-point scales – though Kelly and his graduate students always did this by hand. Today, we have computers! What does this reorganizing do for you? Well, let's give names to the constructs and elements: The person whose grid this represents is looking at:

- E1 – himself
- E2 – his father
- E3 – his sister
- E4 – his brother
- E5 – his mother

He clearly sees his father and brother as similar, and himself and his mother as similar, and his sister as rather different from everyone. His constructs:

- C1 – creative-ordinary

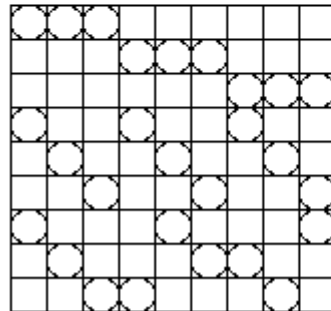
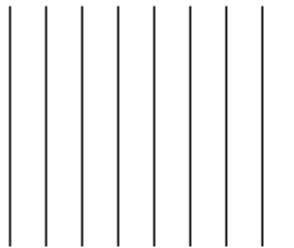
- C2 – undisciplined-disciplined
- C3 – hard-soft
- C4 – sensible-not sensible
- C5 – neurotic-relaxed

You can see that C2R and C3 (hard, disciplined versus soft, undisciplined) are rather synonymous within this range of elements, as are C1 and C4R (neurotic, not sensible versus relaxed, sensible). By dis-covering the structure of this person's meanings, you have learned more than you knew at first (rather than less, as we see in averages and other statistical summaries of information).

Go ahead and analyze your own grid.

The potential of the rep grid is enormous. It has been used in a large variety of settings, especially clinical and industrial. There are also techniques by which we can compare two (or more!) people: If you elicit constructs from two people using a common set of elements, and then analyse the grid together, you will get information on how similar their constructs are!

ELEMENTS



CONSTRUCTS

Similarity Pole

Contrast Pole

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## 19 Projective Techniques

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It is clear that our personally experienced realities are not transparent, not open to others. Hence, much of our personal realities, whether derived from our experience with the physical world or the social world, are quite idiosyncratic: What I mean by shy, or animal, or anger, or love, or female, or house, or God, or humanity...can be significantly different from what you mean.

Further, as we already noted earlier, not every aspect of our personal reality is even readily available for our own contemplation.

This is where projective techniques come in. The Rorschach or inkblot test, used mostly by Freudians, and the Thematic Apperception Test, invented by Henry Murray and Christina Morgan (Murray, 1938) and used to great advantage by David McClelland in his research on need for achievement, are the two most familiar examples. They have the virtue of minimally directing the subject towards pre-conceived ends, hence allowing them to "project" their personal realities onto these ambiguous pictures.

Used just this way, helping, perhaps, a clinician to get a fuller understanding of the client, is without reproach. Unfortunately, when it comes to research (as well as assessment in institutions), the person's descriptions and stories are scored with carefully designed techniques, in a misguided effort to overcome the high susceptibility these techniques have to researcher or evaluator bias.

Instead, the technique you will be using is called hermeneutics. Meaning "interpretation," it is a form of phenomenology used especially when the "meaning-giver" is not available or is not able to bring those meanings to awareness. For example, one might use hermeneutics to try to understand what the original authors of parts of the Bible meant, or what Shakespeare meant when he wrote Hamlet, or what a person who is showing symptoms of repressed impulses "means" by those symptoms, or what the people of a society unconsciously "mean" by their tolerance of evils they outwardly condemn.

It sounds a bit like structural analysis, but isn't: The artifacts studied with the structural method are cultural, i.e. their meanings are shared. In fact, these artifacts are communications of meaning. Hermeneutics tries to get at much more subtle, idiosyncratic, personal meanings. For example, the traditional characters, settings, even themes of plays can be studied structurally, and we can compare, e.g., western plays with kabuki and no and Indonesian drama.... The experiences and emotions the author or actor wishes to express are more appropriately studied by hermeneutics. It's the difference between rules and expression, between "brain" and "heart."

An older method, very similar, was Cooley's (1902) sympathetic introspection – a phrase that could be a definition of hermeneutics. It is not done "objectively" or "behaviorally" – you use your own experiences and emotions to form a closer and closer approximation.

An important part of hermeneutics is the hermeneutic cycle: You read (for example) a piece of literature in its entirety to form an impression. You then go back and look at the pieces, analyze it. Then you relate the pieces back to the whole... back and forth from pieces to whole to pieces to whole. This will lead you to alter your understanding of the pieces and the whole repeatedly.

Your project will involve each of you writing a response to the following "projective" question: Describe an ideal life. Write at least two pages – it should be easy! Then exchange papers with a partner. Each of you attempt to interpret the other's description silently, writing down what you believe might be the other's "deeper" wishes, fears, inferiorities, values, motivations, etc. Then get back together and discuss your interpretations.

Please understand that you are working with minimal information – no serious phenomenologist would risk going on so little! A real hermeneutic case-study would involve a great deal of information from a great variety of sources – interviews, diaries, letters, various projectives, artwork, and so on, for example.

Alternative exercises: Do such an analysis on each other's dreams, or stories created from the T.A.T.-like children's drawings on the next few pages.

An interesting suggested use for hermeneutics is psychobiography. It is not unreasonable to view a person's life as a piece of literature or work of art, which can not be fully understood until it has been completed, so that the parts can be seen in terms of how they contributed to the whole. This also points up the relationship of hermeneutics to psychoanalysis: Hermeneutics is a psychoanalysis within which theory has been bracketed.

## 20 Phenomenology As A Life-Style

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So there you are. Your next step is to begin reading the great examples of the techniques that interest you in the fields that interest you. After that, it's time for you to try your own hand. Only actual experience will lead to true proficiency.

Before I let you go, though, perhaps you have noticed that qualitative methods are more than "just methods" to me; they are an important part of my life-philosophy. It is not my intention to win you over to my philosophy – I believe we each need to develop our own – but I would like to explain myself:

People are not rocks. Our lives are infinitely varied and in constant motion. No person is quite like any other person. No moment is quite like any other moment. We are more like whirlwinds.

If we perceive the goal of the human sciences of to be the prediction and control of human lives, and the scientific method the means of accomplishing that goal, we are ignoring our natures. We are trying to pin down the whirlwinds when without movement whirlwinds cease to exist.

I believe the purpose of method in Psychology is not the improvement of theory, or the accumulation of facts, or the advancement of prediction and control. I believe the purpose of method is the improvement of method itself:

- By looking carefully at our world and ourselves, we learn to see more clearly;
- By engaging reflective consciousness in the task of stilling its own persistent interference, we find ourselves dwelling more fully in immediate consciousness, in the "here-and-now;"
- By resisting deeply-engrained impulses to denigrate the subjective aspects of experience, we come to know our own feelings, needs, and desires;
- By becoming more aware of the richness of reality – inner and outer – we provide ourselves with alternatives, and build a foundation for freedom;
- By opening ourselves to the experiencing of others, we develop our capacity for empathy, love, and compassion.

It is hard to be so insubstantial; it is easier to be a rock. Perhaps the persistence of traditional methods reflects our discomfort at being whirlwinds. But life is more complex than any theory – much more. I suggest we start dealing with that complexity directly, by opening our eyes and our hearts.

## Appendix: Answer To The Iroquois Kinship Problem

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Are you older or younger than I am?

+SENIOR older than ego

-SENIOR younger than ego

Are you male or female?

+MALE male

-MALE female

What generation are you?

>GENERATION senior generation

=GENERATION same generation

<GENERATION junior generation

And the one that has no parallel in our culture, what "side" of the family are you?

+PARALLEL same

-PARALLEL different

If =GENERATION, compare gender of connecting parents of ego and alter;

If >GENERATION, compare gender of ego's connecting parent and alter;

If <GENERATION, compare gender of alter's connecting parent and ego.

So:

1. KIN >GENERATION +PARALLEL +MALE
2. KIN >GENERATION +PARALLEL -MALE
3. KIN >GENERATION -PARALLEL +MALE
4. KIN >GENERATION -PARALLEL -MALE
  
5. KIN =GENERATION +PARALLEL +MALE +SENIOR
6. KIN =GENERATION +PARALLEL +MALE -SENIOR
7. KIN =GENERATION +PARALLEL -MALE +SENIOR
8. KIN =GENERATION +PARALLEL -MALE -SENIOR
9. KIN =GENERATION -PARALLEL

10. KIN <GENERATION +PARALLEL +MALE

11. KIN <GENERATION +PARALLEL -MALE

12. KIN <GENERATION -PARALLEL +MALE

13. 13. KIN <GENERATION -PARALLEL +MALE

14. 14. KIN <GENERATION -PARALLEL -MALE

15. 15. KIN <GENERATION -PARALLEL -MALE

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