

TOWARDS THE RE-CONSTRUCTION OF A CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST AND A REFLEXIVE BODY OF PRACTICE.

5. Criteria for rigour and quality of knowing: informing practice and the writing about practice.

Introduction

Given the 'fine-print/bold-print' analogy I have used to describe my early reading and understanding of the research literature, certain criteria or concepts which embody rigour and quality of 'knowing' suggested themselves more than others as being relevant to me. At this point I sought to move away from the term 'validity' as it all too powerfully evoked earlier frameworks for research in the quantitative and experimental tradition - these were concepts I had been thoroughly taught in my training regarding the practice of psychometric testing.

At this stage I wish to present my growing understanding of issues of quality of knowing and how I saw them as being relevant to early attempts at action inquiry.

I am also making explicit here the concepts from research literature and from my clinical practice which underpinned my early writing. I do not pretend that I used these all in a fully conscious way, rather they occupied foreground and background according to the experiences under consideration and my intentions at the time. I will consider relevant criteria from constructivist and critical theory positions, from Naturalistic Inquiry, Cooperative Inquiry, and Collaborative inquiry. I also consider warrants from recent theorising in the field of systemic family therapy, and from some clinical practice frameworks.

In subsequent chapters in this section, where I write about my exploration of several inquiry approaches, I will comment on my use of these criteria. Again, they pre-date my explicit awareness of and use of a Narrative Inquiry framework. However, looking through these lenses at this stage of my journey, this chapter represents a dialogue with other voices from the literature and a seeking to find a coherent set of quality and rigour criteria for both practice and writing.

The inclusion of this chapter at this point may suggest a linearity of progression in use of and understanding about quality criteria. In practice the reality was more complex as this growing understanding developed reflexively with writing, practice and dialogue with others. I include the chapter here as frame for guiding discussion about 'quality of knowing' issues throughout subsequent chapters. This discussion pre-dates my explicit awareness of Narrative Inquiry as a research methodology, with its accompanying criteria for quality of knowing. However, the warrants for writing which I outline have many features which resonate with it. I will present my selection of warrants in two sections, from theory and from clinical practice.

Warrants from Theory.

Warrants from Constructivist philosophy.

Some of the ideas from a broadly constructivist epistemology have been emerging in the family systems literature over the past decade and have been influencing practice in that field (and I will refer to these shortly). So, although I had some familiarity with the concepts, it was not until reading Lincoln and Guba's (1985) Naturalistic Inquiry that I became more familiar with the philosophical underpinnings of constructivism and where it stood alongside other philosophical frameworks. Further reading of them (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) provided a more elaborated set of assumptions underpinning inquiry within their broad ranging constructivist paradigm. This provided me a standpoint for 'knowing about things' which guided and warranted my writing about research experiences in storied form, and which started to connect with developments in the family systems field.

As I started the research, I also took up a teaching role in a local introductory course in Family Therapy, and in the process caught up with more recent developments in the field which were

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influenced by social constructionism. I realised that much of my training and practice had implicitly been informed by critical theory assumptions. Namely, that there were some 'truths' or state of affairs which were likely to be more useful and transformative than others, and I as a professional sought to expand peoples' awareness about this and help them move toward it. Structural Family therapy is an example, based on certain notions of 'healthy family'. Taking such a position can be empowering for both practitioner and client, provided there is some level of conversation which examines the underlying assumptions and checks their degree of 'fit' for the individuals and the setting in question.

So, as I was reading about this for teaching in family therapy through constructivist lens, I was also learning more about it through reading for research. The following are a series of assumptions which Guba and Lincoln make which flow from a constructivist philosophy and which intellectually appealed as grist for the research mill.

- "We cannot stress too strongly the assertion that human knowledge consists of a series of constructions, which, precisely because they are humanly generated, are problematic, that is, indeterminate, unsettled and ambiguous." (p68).
- "Constructions represent the efforts of people to *make sense* out of their situations, out of the state of affairs in which they find themselves. They are *interpretations* based primarily on experience - to "see it with my own eyes" or to "hear it with my own ears" is the best evidence that anyone can muster to demonstrate to him or herself the validity of his or her own constructions" (p70)
- "...constructions are, quite literally, *created realities*. They do not exist outside of the persons who create and hold them: they are not part of some "objective" world that exists apart from their constructors".(p143)
- "Constructions come about through the interaction of a constructor with information, contexts, settings, situations, and other constructors (not all of whom may agree) using a process that is rooted in the previous experience, belief systems, values, fears, prejudices, hopes, disappointments, and achievements of the constructor."(p143)
- "The major task of the constructivist investigator is to tease out the constructions that the various actors in a setting hold and, so far as possible, to bring them into conjunction - a joining-with one another and with whatever information can be brought to bear on the issues involved." (p142)
- What is frequently taken to be "reality" is in fact a socially shared construction, at some levels the implicit agreement to work within broad cultural mores about how we should behave. At another level it may be an attempt to collectively and systematically come to some agreement about the state of affairs (e.g. science). Any individual's account of this will only be partial and shifting.

In their view, constructions are both self-sustaining and self-renewing. They are often held by individuals as 'truths' with a large degree of utility flowing from them, and are not given up lightly. They are open to change when the constructor is provided with new information which challenges them, and the degree to which they are changed depends on the nature of the information and the degree to which the constructor sees the need to move toward a more sophisticated interpretation. Such changes often occur in crisis according to the authors. Guba and Lincoln advocate that in the inquiry process all constructions are potentially meaningful and they must all be afforded an opportunity to be heard and honoured.

It is the perspective on 'truth and reality' and the implications for inquiry which these assumptions offer, and which led me to selecting them out to help me address my early series of questions regarding writing. However, there were to be contradictions between my theorising and my own experience which became painfully apparent in time.

Warrants from Naturalistic Inquiry.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer a set of criteria for judging the quality and rigour of inquiry within their model of Naturalistic Inquiry. The term they use is *Trustworthiness* and they offer some criteria and operational guidelines for establishing this. Trustworthiness is defined by the question "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?" (p290). I have described earlier those dimensions of Naturalistic Inquiry which appealed as having something to offer my inquiry purposes, and consistent with these I selected out criteria of trustworthiness which seemed most useful to my purposes in writing. These are the ones which seemed to me to best fit the constructivist position - that knowledge is a human construction never able to be certified as absolutely or ultimately true, is problematic and ever changing, and comprises multiple perspectives.

- *Credibility*: This can be established by: prolonged engagement; persistent observation; use of multiple sources (types of information and ways of obtaining the same information); use of multiple methods and multiple theories; peer de-briefing.
- *Transferability*: This can be aided by a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of the research field, so that an audience can identify the elements of setting and contexts in which the inquiry was conducted sufficiently to know how applicable the findings are to their own settings.

There were several other criteria which I could not see fitting either Cooperative or Collaborative Inquiry and which seemed uncomfortably close to traditional criteria of reliability and validity. In many aspects of their methodology I see an implicit framing of the researcher as someone who is an 'outsider' who either temporarily joins a system then departs after the inquiry, or alternately maintains a distance from the action. Whilst the role of 'outsider temporarily joining the system' is an appropriate role for certain types of inquiry, it did not suit my purposes. However, there were things of value for my purposes, where I was an 'insider', and a participant as well a researcher. In their terms, I was also a 'stakeholder'. It was this frame which informed what I took from Lincoln and Guba's Naturalistic Inquiry.

In a later work on evaluation, Guba and Lincoln (1989) observe that their earlier criteria for quality and rigour have an over-reliance on method and an under-reliance on the role of constructions, thereby linking them implicitly with traditional research models. They develop criteria more consistent with the constructivist philosophy, relating to a concept they call *Authenticity*. There are five dimensions to this as follows.

- *Fairness* - the extent to which the different constructions and their underlying value structures are honoured.
- *Ontological authenticity* - the extent to which the participants' own constructions are improved, matured, extended and elaborated over the course of the inquiry, to the extent that they have more information and are more sophisticated in its use.
- *Educative authenticity* - the extent to which individual participants' understanding of and appreciation for the construction of others outside their stakeholding group are enhanced.
- *Catalytic authenticity* - the extent to which action is stimulated and facilitated by the evaluation process.
- *Tactical authenticity* - the extent to which the stakeholders and participants are empowered to act.

Lincoln and Guba (1990b) suggest a set of related criteria for judging the quality of case reports, whereby the writing about an inquiry ought to reflect the values and frameworks inherent in the conducting of the inquiry. These are summarised as follows.

- *Resonance criteria*: There ought to be a degree of fit, overlap or reinforcement between the case study report as written and the basic belief system underpinning the paradigm the researcher has chosen to follow.
- *Rhetorical criteria*: It should display unity: (be well-organised, contain some central idea easily discernible to the reader); should display simplicity or clarity; and should display craftsmanship.

Craftmanship has a series of dimensions as follows: has power and elegance; is creative; is open and problematic; shows awareness of writer's own constructions; displays courage; shows emotional and intellectual commitment to constructions advanced; displays egalitarian stance towards others.

- *Empowerment criteria*. It shows that authenticity criteria have been addressed in the inquiry.
- *Applicability criteria*. The case study enables the reader to draw inferences which may have applicability in her or his own situation.- for example readers have a 'deja-vu' experience, discern metaphors which speak to their own experience, and re-examine their own construction in relation to the phenomena discussed. This elaborates upon transferability criteria.

These felt to me to be very stretching, demanding and rather daunting criteria. But as I was not yet doing 'research', this was a first attempt at trying to strive toward some of these criteria. Credibility, Transferability and Resonance seemed within reach. I was working on developing the Rhetorical criterion in writing, and from there I thought I could try moving toward Fairness, Catalytic, and Tactical Authenticity.

Warrants from Cooperative and Collaborative Inquiry.

I have grouped these two together regarding quality of knowing criteria because I saw them as interrelated in practice through their emphasis on knowledge-in-and-for action. Cooperative Inquiry has a set of validity criteria (Reason, 1988) which pertain to its fuller forms and are embedded in the processes by which inquiry groups are conducted. Nonetheless, at this stage, there were several associated concepts which I saw as contributing to rigour of inquiry which I could use, even though I had not yet begun the 'research proper' and fulfilled my intentions to start a Cooperative Inquiry group.

- *Interpenetrating attention span* - as advocated by Torbert (1981). This had early implications for both reflection and action. It seemed a useful framework for thinking about interrelationships within an organisation and as a model for guiding the 'reflection-in-action' of myself as an individual. Torbert operationalises this for use in practice at the level of interpersonal dialogue and I will refer to this in more detail when I attempt to use it in practice. I thought stories should show the extent to which I was able to notice the interrelationships between purpose, strategy, behaviour and outcomes, both within myself and also between individuals, groups and organisations.
- *Critical Subjectivity* - as advocated within Cooperative Inquiry (Reason, 1988). I would need to demonstrate how I approached finding the 'critically subjective' stance, where I was noticing the interplay between my personal process and events in the 'objective' world. From clinical practice I knew this as an analogue of 'the observer position' so felt I could at least partly meet this as a criterion for quality knowing. Critical subjectivity is more a conceptual category covering many

different activities (an interpenetrating attention span could be an example), but it seemed a useful 'shorthand' to keep in the foreground to alert me to my own stance.

- *Heron's extended epistemology.* Any research or inquiry findings should display a grounding in, and a moving between, all four ways of knowing - experiential, presentational, propositional and practical.
- *Cycles of action and reflection.* Both Cooperative Inquiry and Collaborative Inquiry primarily intend to produce knowledge for action and within action. Each contains a dimension of cycling between reflection and action. Heron (1981) talks of two dimensions of experiential research, phenomenological mapping and intentional acting. The former is noticing, awarely discriminating and categorising what is going on, being fully open to the phenomena in question. The latter is the trying out of some developmental procedure which follows from hypotheses held about persons. Full experiential research requires a complementarity between the two, "between experiential receptivity and active agency" (p160). I felt my accounts of inquiry should gain a sense of how I was managing this complementarity.
- *Authentic collaboration.* The reader should be able to discern how I was seeking to create the conditions under which authentically collaborative relationships could occur within the field of inquiry. This was to be a source of considerable dissonance for me as I saw a full-blown Cooperative inquiry as the ideal but could not achieve this within the limitations of the setting and my own way of working. It took even longer to explore the possibilities for and limitations of collaborative practice and this quest underpins my research journey.

Warrants from Family Systems theory.

I am presenting one set of theoretical ideas from within the broadly based approach of Systemic Therapies which historically were influenced strongly by the work of Bateson (1972,1979) and Watzlawick, Weakland and Fisch (1974). However, more recently, in what is referred to as the 'Post-Milan' approach, social constructionism (e.g. Gergen, 1985) as an epistemological framework has increasingly taken a strong position in the foreground of theorising in the field. It places emphasis on the social process by which knowledge and meaning is derived. Knowledge is co-created through interaction between individuals, is shaped by the conventions of language and other social processes, and is historically situated. Through the process of teaching and the preparation of materials and exercises for trainees, I began more consciously to bring this framework for thinking about practice into the foreground and tentatively explore its utility for me.

Cronen and Pearce (1985) offer a tentative "Systemic epistemology", rooted in social constructivist ideas, to aid theorising about the evolution of family systems. For my purposes, it offered a specific conceptual framework for thinking about the interaction of beliefs, behaviour and relationship in making sense of events I was participating in and wishing to present in writing. The starting point for their model is the view that the structure of a family lies in the relationships among members and is tied reflexively to action - whatever action members engage in both expresses and reconstitutes the structure of the family system. Because individuals are always acting in the world, and because of this reflexivity, Cronen and Pearce theorise that the family as a system evolves over time (although not always without pain). The content and organisation of structure emerges out of conjoint action and is always in a process of emergence.

Their proposal for how meaning is managed within families is based on two claims. One is that all social structures entail ways of managing consciousness or awareness of the various elements of those structures. The other is that social actors organise meaning both temporally and hierarchically and it is this aspect I wish to draw upon. The authors conceive of social meanings as hierarchically organised so that one level is the context for the interpretation of the others. They propose a number of embedded levels of context in which one or more can become the context for attributing meaning in another. Thus the social actor 'punctuates' sequences of events and makes sense according to whichever level of context is operating at the time. The number of embedded levels is not fixed, but they suggest five for the purpose of understanding how meaning is managed within families.

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- *Family Myth*: Higher order general conceptions of how society, personal roles and family relationships work.
- *Life-Scripting*: A person's conception of self in social action. For example "I am intellectual and sceptic".
- *Relationship*: A conception of how, and on what terms, two or more persons engage. For example, part of a relationship concept might be "I am the initiator, he/she is the follower".
- *Episode*: Conceptions of patterns of reciprocated acts. For example, "Our usual fights are over who gets to use the car".
- *Speech Act*: The relational meanings of verbal and non-verbal messages. For example, "promise " and " conceding the point" take on meaning from the episode in which they occur.

Each of the five is a marker for a complex of information at a particular level of abstraction, and they are arranged hierarchically from the more abstract and general to the particular. There is a reflexivity among the levels, although the nature of this reflexivity changes over time. For example, for a couple who are in the early stages of getting acquainted, the nature of their relationship is very sensitive to the conduct of a particular episode. However as their relationship begins to emerge it in turn will come to have a stronger influence over how any particular episode is interpreted. Overall, the longer the history of relationship, the more powerful the downward influence of the higher order levels of context become and the weaker the upward influence of the lower order.

Cronen and Pearce propose a model for understanding the interactions between different levels of context, and between context, meaning and action within families. They also offer perspectives on the interaction between consciousness and structure, each being a by-product of the other. Consciousness is organised according to how individuals are positioned by language and perceptions of roles, duties and responsibilities. However, it is not my purpose to enlarge on this here. I wish to present only the idea of an hierarchically arranged series of embedded contexts as an aid to 'making sense'. I saw it as having use in the world of work. I wondered about another level of context, namely that of 'organisational myth' which contains socially developed conceptions of 'what this organisation is about' and 'how we relate to the wider world' and 'how one is meant to act within the organisation'. This can be an additional level of context containing constructions for understanding and guiding relationships at work, in interplay with the others.

For me, this was a framework from the world of therapy which I was exploring and which I thought a potentially useful aid in thinking about relationships and making sense of them. I believed that it would be a warrant in my writing if I could convey the interplay between action and differing contexts for making sense as I perceived it - not in rigidly held 'this is truth' terms, but in lightly held and emergent terms of 'this is my best guess at the moment which could be changed with further information from a different vantage point'. As Cronen and Pearce comment, "No social system can operate with near total consciousness of its own structure from a third person position at all times. Try falling in love that way!" (p83). This comment rang true. Without holding dear to favourite truths how can one have the necessary degree of passion or commitment to engage in long term development. The challenge is to know when favoured truths are hindering and not helping.

A warrant from critical theory.

Although I have made some observations already on the relative merits, as I see them, of critical theory and constructivism, I would like to include an explicit statement here about the value I saw in a critical theory position as I began exploring methods of inquiry.

Critical theory seeks to work towards transformation as if some central truth/s existed. It captured the idea for me that some deeply held values are not very open to change (unless major crisis/es lead to a paradigm shift) and therefore act as fundamental truths. This honours the 'reality' of day to day

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experience. A constructivist position provides a position from which one may stand and notice some of these 'truths' and allow for a reviewing of them in the light of new experience and new knowledge. But a critical theory position allows for fundamentals or essences about human nature and the universe, these are necessary as foundations for full engagement in what one is doing (akin to the third stage of coop inquiry, where the individual brackets off initial hypotheses and theories about experience and fully engages in practice)

A comment on warrants from theory.

The above set of criteria did not capture the sense of reflexivity I came to experience in my relationship to writing, where writing became a form of inquiry in itself, 'writing me' as I 'wrote it'. This process is captured more by the narrative inquiry framework which came much later. Therefore these criteria were useful as a starting point, rather than an ending point. I used them as aids to a 'critical subjectivity' or reflexivity in the following ways.

- By noticing my own and others' constructions and how they were operating as best I could, as problematic, shifting and indeterminate.
- By using the construct of embeddedness of context to look at relationships and the actions within them - this would be one schema for noticing and commenting upon my own construing.
- By describing the situation, the action and the contexts which were operating for me.
- By being explicit about my own 'truth-positions', thus providing an edge, a standpoint from which to notice, comment and make sense.

Warrants from clinical practice

These felt most familiar to me and are ones in which I felt most experientially grounded and confident, and to that extent they probably informed my writing more actively than the warrant from theory. However, there are varying degrees of correspondence between the two sets of warrants. Those from theory elaborated upon and in some cases 'warranted the warrants' from practice, whereas those from practice implicitly operationalised some of the theoretical constructs from theory.

In order to describe this warrant it is necessary to first of all trace the development of some key influences on my clinical practice. In first moving away from the individually focused models towards the *interactionally focused models* under the family systems umbrella, I was influenced by the work of Watzlawick, Weakland and Fisch. Three influential concepts were:

- The distinction between *first order* and *second order* change based on mathematical Group Theory and the Theory of Logical Types. First order change occurs when the elements in a system change but without any change in the rules governing the relationship between the elements. Second order change occurs when the rules governing relationships change and hence the system moves to a different level of functioning.
- The distinction between *digital* and *analogue* communication. Digital equates with 'content' and analogue with 'process'. Digital consists of a class of message where a statement has only one referent which has previously been defined. It is precise, logical and literal. It is best used to describe people's relationship with the physical environment, for example building a bridge.

Analogue consists of a class of message where a statement has multiple referents. It is capable of having different meanings according to the context in which the communication occurs. It has an 'as if' quality, equates with metaphor, and is best used for describing the relationships between people. Analogue aspects of

communication provide a 'meta-communication' about digital aspects, commenting on implicit or explicit rules, who sets them, and what is allowable. Both are necessary to allow for the complexity of human experience.

- *Reframing*. This concept is defined by Watzlawick, Weakland and Fisch (1974) as "To change the conceptual and/or emotional setting in relation to which a situation is experienced and to place it in another frame which fits the "facts" of the same concrete situation equally well or even better and thereby changes its entire meaning". (P95) Reframing opens up the possibility of new solutions.

The development of these ideas were significantly influenced by the work of Milton Erickson whose unique approach to change was based on his use of hypnotic procedures to shift and expand individuals' appreciation of themselves and their situations, and to utilise solutions available within this extended awareness. There have been numerous attempts to describe his approach and to capture the essence of what he does. Hayley's (1973) account provides two metaphors which stayed with me.

- Change should be like creating a snowball by letting it roll down hill.
- Solution's are contained within the problems which clients bring to therapy. Use what the client brings to you.

The practice which is required in order to bring these metaphors to life within therapy consists of paying very careful attention to the *language and the metaphors* the client/s use. It also consists of using the clients goals for change as the goals for therapy and this entails careful inquiry in the early stages to solicit these. Working with the client to help them move from problem to solution requires starting from within their frame of reference and expanding this so that new perspectives and hence new solutions become available. The *telling of stories* and use of metaphor by the therapist is one means of expanding these frames of reference. These may be stories about 'other clients I have worked with', stories from literature, or stories deliberately crafted which contain metaphorical representation of the client's experience together with possible alternatives available to them. This approach contained implicit recognition of multiple, local and partial realities. The telling of stories may be sufficient in and of itself, or it may require directives from the therapist which help the client pay attention to aspects of their experience to which they had previously been unaware.

Another influence on my practice has been the concept of the *individual and family life cycle*, informed by different models of development across the life span. A central metaphor for me within this is one of *transition and change*. It is typical that individuals and families experience problems around times of transition which require the re-negotiation of relationships with themselves, each other and the wider world. Transition connotes *dilemma*, where there are choices to be made about how the transition is to be negotiated. The task of the therapist is to surface the dilemmas contained within the presenting problems and explore the alternative possible means of resolving or transcending them. This occurs against a background appreciation of 'real life' tasks, duties, responsibilities and so on which face the different family members according to the particular developmental requirements of the life cycle.

So, my clinical practice is informed by careful listening for language and metaphor; joining with people to understand 'how it is for them' and starting at their 'pace'; listening for *stories* and telling stories; and looking for who else is in the field who can contribute towards success.

One means of telling stories and using metaphor is through *letter writing*. This can be used at different stages of the therapeutic process according to what the therapist is wishing to achieve. It can be used to engage people, to join with them and check out that the therapist has sufficient understanding of 'how it is for them', to surface dilemmas in a way which the client can 'hear', and so on. I use letters from time to time for these purposes and see them as a means of inquiry - noticing effects of the letter according to my purpose, sometimes directly inquiring and sometimes merely noticing according to the nature of the relationships and context in which the letter was sent. More recently, letter writing has been elaborated upon within a social constructionist framework which emphasises the narrative aspects of experience, and letters are used as a means of helping clients 're-author' their *life narratives*. White and Epston (1990) are two such writers and are individuals I have worked with in the early 1980's in New

Zealand. I learned from them some of the 'craft' knowledge required to use letters in an empowering and affirming way. However, at that time much of what occurred under the family systems umbrella was experimental and under-theorised. Narrative metaphors and a constructivist/social constructionist epistemology were not present as theoretical frameworks.

My continuing use of these practice skills and approaches is affirmed by the regular feedback I get from clients and colleagues. A frequent question is "how do you remember all these things about me?" My answer to myself is that I listen for the stories in their lives, not only the stories which contain problems, guilt and blame, but also the stories implicit or only partially told about strengths in the face of adversity and about possibilities for transformation and change. These stories become the scaffolding upon which hang the details of their lives. I retain the scaffolding and the details present themselves to me when necessary according to the nature and requirements of the particular conversation at hand.

A current colleague once commented that she enjoyed reading my written assessments and care plans in the case notes of clients for whom I required the involvement of other team members. "I feel that I get a picture of who they are and what their lives are about and what they want from us before I get to meet them". On inquiry, the characteristics of my writing which created this impression was the sense of story, the description of salient features of the clients life situation, goals for change and help required written in the clients language, together with my own observations and impressions.

A clinical practice illustration using letter writing.

I would like to illustrate these aspects of my practice by giving an example of how I used a letter to engage a client in the process of change by letting her know I had heard her story about shame and powerlessness, but also offered her 'another story' which I had heard implicitly in her life which offered more liberating possibilities.

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Sheila was a gently mannered woman in her fifties who had drifted into alcohol misuse over the course of her married life. She and her husband had run a joint family business together but she had left this several years ago to care for her ageing parents full-time and they had both died in the past year. She had reached the point now, at a major transition time in her life, where she was depressed and grieving, and where her dependent use of alcohol was contributing to personal, marital and health problems. She was consumed with shame about this, to the point that she was unsure whether she was able to change and was unsure whether she was entitled to professional help. She pictured her husband as someone who was "disgusted" by her drinking, but also recognised that this might be a position he took to galvanise her into action.

On the other hand, Sheila was also ambivalent about giving up her attachment to alcohol and the short term relief from distress it provided her. If I were to successfully engage her, I felt the issue of shame needed addressing first. At the end of the initial session, she made several comments: that she felt unable to stop drinking altogether and so wished to try to control it first before considering other options; and that she was not sure she could be helped because she could not find "a reason" for her drinking - there had been no obvious adverse circumstances in her life until recently. My assessment was that she was unlikely to succeed in her stated goals on her own, and I wanted her to feel she could return when she was ready, but from a position of more hope and less shame. My intention was to give her another perspective on herself and her situation which fitted closely enough with her experience (as I had discerned it) that she would feel it 'spoke to her', but different enough that it would offer some possible ways out of guilt, blame and isolation. I also wanted to place it in a more 'normalised' and interpersonal framework which would alert her and her husband to the changes in relationships which would need to be negotiated for growth and transformation to occur.

It will be apparent to the reader that there are other frames in addition to the ones I mentioned which inform this letter (such as assumptions about gender), but it is not my purpose to enlarge upon them here. I have changed those details which in any way may serve to identify Sheila.

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"Dear Sheila,

I thought it might be helpful if I wrote to you summarising our recent meeting as I understood it, and outline the options as I saw them. In thinking about your situation I have borne your husband in mind and I would be quite happy if you wished to show him this letter.

As I understood it, you are currently adapting to the very painful loss of both your parents within the past year. However, you told me that this fact alone does not help you understand how it is that you have become so dependent on alcohol over the years. As I heard it, you feel there have been no real problems in your life, having two healthy children and now grandchildren, having had a very busy and satisfying working life where you enjoyed a good working partnership with your husband, having a comfortable home, and managing to have enjoyed your parents despite the fact that they required a considerable degree of care and support from you in their later years.

The lack of any obvious 'cause' for your drinking seemed to leave you feeling very puzzled and without anything tangible to tackle in order to overcome it and the deeply held sense of shame you experience because of it. Nonetheless, you are at a point where you are thinking that things need to change even if at present you have no clear idea about how you might create a future for yourself without alcohol.

From my point of view, you share many issues with other women I see at a similar stage of life. They have spent nearly all of their adult lives being daughters, wives, mothers and, in later years, parents to their own parents as they need increasing care and support. Frequently they have had little space in their lives to pay attention to the 'individual' part of themselves that may have only been partly developed before these other roles took up so much time and energy. Many such women have found, each in their own individual way, that alcohol could help fill that gap or provide some 'space' for themselves.

So, in reaching a stage in their lives where their children have left home and where they no longer have parents to care for or turn to, they face major changes. It is a time when couples have more time to be a couple and need to re-negotiate what sort of relationship they want together. It is a time when each of the couple are faced with finding other ways or new ways of finding fulfilment as individuals. For men that may mean looking outside their working lives, particularly if they are facing retirement.

For women, it may mean a different challenge as they are very often out of practise in thinking about their own needs. Alternatively, they may face a crisis of confidence in moving outside the home if they want to re-enter the paid workforce. They may discover that they also feel isolated and lack confidence in making new friendships outside the home. Recent bereavements can make this doubly difficult because that necessarily involves some time dwelling in the past before being ready to move into the future.

Overcoming alcohol problems, no matter what the original "cause", requires that individuals find some way of sorting through these issues in their own way. This is not always easy and can seem rather daunting initially. In my experience, if one member of a couple begins to make some changes without the involvement of the other, then that can place a strain on the marriage. For this reason it is important that they be involved in the process.

In relation to your current situation, my opinion is that you will need an alcohol free period of at least several months to take stock of things and to assess for yourself how much your feelings at present are due to you and how much is due to

alcohol. If you feel you cannot achieve this on your own then we can talk further about how I can help with this. One thing is clear to me, that alcohol will only eventually take a back seat in your life when you have other things in its place. Coming for help was one of a number of steps you have taken to begin this process. I would be happy to see you again, either by yourself or with your husband, if you would like to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely."

Over the course of the next few months, Sheila wrote several brief letters to me, saying that things had essentially not changed and that she would probably need to come back to see me. Eventually she wrote saying that she had been unsuccessful in controlling her drinking and that she needed help in stopping altogether. I arranged for her to stay residentially in the clinic for detoxification followed by a several weeks of rehabilitation in which she worked with various staff in exploring the changes she wished to make. By the time she was ready to leave, she had already started towards some of her goals. On the day of her discharge she approached me in the corridor to thank me. As we parted, she turned back to say, "Do you remember the letter you wrote to me last year? That described me exactly!"

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Commentary on warrants from theory and practice.

There were two levels or domains of use for which I developed the above set of criteria. One was to inform my research action, the other was to inform my writing about it. The tension which was to pervade for sometime was that I had bracketed off current behaviour as 'practising for the research proper' which I had envisaged would begin when I gained the full and explicit collaboration with colleagues as co-researchers in a Cooperative inquiry. In the meantime, my action in the field was 'merely practice' and my writing about it in story form felt less than fully authentic because I did not have such full collaboration, as I saw it. So although I felt authentic in writing about my own actions and experiences, I was bothered about the authenticity of writing about others in the field because I had not gained the mutuality of commitment and fullness of explicit collaboration I intended.

As I began writing and recording my research experiences these were the things I took with me. I was not clear how I would use them in the sense of priority or importance, but I carried them with varying degrees of awareness and they lay behind and within the action and the writing processes. They seem a large 'tool kit' to carry, but nonetheless carry them I did. Some of them intersect and overlap with each other so that the use of one implies the other. Some criteria were activated in certain contexts, others in different contexts. In other words, although they were carried, and potentially always available, some occupied foreground at any one time while the others remained in the background.

The application and development of these ideas in practice will weave itself throughout the remainder of the research, and I will comment on their use when I notice their presence.