

Building Connections in Qualitative Research

Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner in Conversation With Stacy Holman Jones

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Abstract: Carolyn ELLIS and Art BOCHNER tell the stories of their education, their interests in and commitment to qualitative research as a way to make meaning in and through personal relationships, and their passion for creating a community of narrative and autoethnographic researchers as a complement to—rather than a replacement for—the knowledge generated through more traditional forms of qualitative and quantitative research.

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About the Interview

This conversation on qualitative research took place in March 2004 at the home of Carolyn ELLIS and Art BOCHNER. The conversation was audiotaped and ran for nearly two hours. Stacy Holman JONES edited the transcribed conversation. Carolyn ELLIS and Art BOCHNER read, offered suggestions, and consulted on the editing and re-sequencing of the stories Stacy wrote from the transcriptions for coherence and readability. The section titled "Meeting Each Other" was written and added during the editing process. [1]

About the Interviewees

Art BOCHNER is a Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of South Florida. His research focuses on interpersonal communication contexts, including close relationships, marital and family communication, and aging and health. He is also interested in communication theory and philosophy of communication. Art's work takes up these theoretical, philosophical, and contextual interests through narrative inquiry, interpretive studies, and ethnography. His articles include:

- "Love Survives" (2003) in *Qualitative Inquiry* 9(2)
- "Narrative's Virtues" (2001) in *Qualitative Inquiry* 7(2)
- "Criteria Against Ourselves" (2000) in *Qualitative Inquiry* 6(2)
- "The Coercive Grip in Neutrality: Can Psychology Escape" (1993) in *Contemporary Psychology* 38
- "On Taking Ourselves Seriously: An Analysis of Some Persistent Problems and Promising Directions in Interpersonal Research" (1978) in *Human Communication Research* 4. [2]

Art has edited special editions of journals, including an issue on the arts and narrative inquiry for *Qualitative Inquiry* with Marjatta SAARNIVAARA (2003) and an issue on family communication for the *Journal of Applied Communication Research* (1989). He has presented numerous keynote lectures, including a symposium on "Education after 9/11" (2002) and the Seminar on The Arts and Narrative Inquiry (2001), both at the University of Art and Design in Helsinki, Finland. In fall 2004, Art and Carolyn will serve as University Guest Scholars in Residence at Beijing Broadcasting University. In addition, Art has served as scholar in residence at Saginaw Valley State University (1999), the University of South Africa (1998), Syracuse University (1997), Old Dominion University (1993), Purdue University (1989), and the University of Texas (1983). His honors and awards include a spotlight on his scholarship sponsored by the Ethnography Division of the National Communication Association (NCA), a McNight Foundation Most Valuable Doctoral Mentor Award, and the Speech Communication Association's Teachers on Teaching Award for contributions to the philosophy and methodology of teaching, and numerous grants. You can reach Art by mail at the Department of Communication, University of South Florida, 4202 E. Fowler Avenue, CIS1040, Tampa, Florida, 33620-7800 and by email at abochner@cas.usf.edu. [3]

Carolyn ELLIS is a Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of South Florida. Her research centers on how individuals negotiate identities, emotions, and meaning making in and through close relationships. She explores these themes by writing at the intersections of autoethnography, literature, and socio/cultural analysis. Her work includes her most recent book, *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography* (2004, Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press) as well as *Final Negotiations: A Story of Love*,

Loss and Chronic Illness (1995, Philadelphia: Temple University Press). Her articles include:

- [Grave Tending: With Mother at the Cemetery](#) (2003) in *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 4(2)
- "Take No Chances" (2002) in *Qualitative Inquiry* 8(2)
- "With Mother/With Child: A True Story" (2001) in *Qualitative Inquiry* 7(5)
- "He(art)ful Autoethnography" (1999) in *Qualitative Health Research* 9(5)
- "'There are Survivors': Telling a Story of Sudden Death" (1993) in *The Sociological Quarterly* 34(4). [4]

Carolyn is the recipient of numerous honors and awards, including the National Communication Association's Ethnography Division award for Distinguished Publication for her "With Mother/With Child" essay. She has received several teaching honors including a University of South Florida Outstanding Undergraduate University Teaching Award. Carolyn has also been the subject of scholar's spotlight panels sponsored by the Ethnography and Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction (SSSI) Divisions of NCA. In 2003, she was invited to present at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Stony Brook Sociology Department's Distinguished Alumni Colloquium. You can reach Carolyn by mail at the Department of Communication, University of South Florida, 4202 E. Fowler Avenue, CIS1040, Tampa, Florida, 33620-7800 and by email at cellis@cas.usf.edu. [5]

Together, Art and Carolyn have co-authored numerous articles, including:

- "Bringing Emotionality and Subjectivity into Cultural Studies" (in press) in *Publications of the Research Unit for Contemporary Culture*
- "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject" (2000) in *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd edition)
- "Which Way to Turn?" (1999) in *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 28
- "Personal Narrative as a Social Approach to Interpersonal Communication" in *Communication Theory* (May 1992). [6]

Carolyn and Art also edited a special issue on ethnography in the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* and are editors of AltaMira's Ethnographic Alternatives Series, which includes the edited collection *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing* (1996, Walnut Creek, CA). [7]

1. Becoming a Qualitative Researcher

Stacy: Let's first talk about how you came to consider yourselves qualitative researchers and the influences, motivations, and perspectives that were especially important for you in becoming qualitative researchers. [8]

1.1 Carolyn's story

Carolyn: When I was an undergraduate in sociology at William and Mary, I read Erving GOFFMAN's (1959) *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. I thought it was an incredible book and I knew I wanted to do what GOFFMAN did. When I learned from GOFFMAN that you could actually go out and watch people and interact with them and write about it, I was in heaven. [9]

Stacy: Did you do any qualitative research projects as an undergraduate? [10]

Carolyn: I remember doing an activist qualitative project for a social psychology class. The professor had us work in groups. My group decided to try to get a post office established on campus, so students didn't have to use the town post office. [11]

Stacy: Did you do other qualitative work? [12]

Carolyn: We were mainly taught quantitative research tools and typically wrote theoretical papers. I don't remember doing another qualitative research project until my honor's thesis, which was a study of an isolated fishing community. That turned into my dissertation, a comparative study of two fishing villages [see ELLIS (1986) *Fisher Folk: Two Communities on Chesapeake Bay*]. I continued working on that study during the seven years I was in graduate school in sociology at SUNY Stony Brook. [13]

Stacy: Have you always considered yourself to be a qualitative researcher? [14]

Carolyn: Yes, from as soon as I knew what it was, from the time I was first in college. [15]

Stacy: You said, "That's for me." [16]

Carolyn: I said, "That's for me," and I've never moved away from it. Actually I loved statistics—I thought that approach was fun—but it didn't address the kinds of questions I wanted to examine. [17]

1.2 Art's story

Art: I was in graduate school in the late 1960s, which was a very schizophrenic period to be a graduate student. During this time, there was a cleavage between political activism and the move to make the study of communication more social scientific. On the one hand, you had an interest in what we used to call back then

jerk-free interpersonal relationships—characterized by spontaneity, self disclosure, openness, the greening of America; and, on the other hand, you had a movement within speech communication from being primarily associated with the humanities to a more social scientific identification. It's interesting to follow the so-called methodological culture wars between qualitative and *quantitative* research because back then, quantitative researchers were just trying to get a foot in the door and to integrate social science into the curriculum in speech communication. [18]

I was on the edge of the new communication theory. My doctoral advisor, Raymond TUCKER, had just come back from a sabbatical at Harvard where he had studied families, children, and communication. He also learned multivariate statistics. At that time, graduate students studied with one or two people—and so I was immersed in what TUCKER was interested in. He was very committed to making communication research a science and in that respect emulating the traditions in social psychology. Most of the budding stars of communication research then were immersed in experimental research, experimental design, and laboratory research. But TUCKER also taught courses in family communication, interpersonal relations, family therapy, and systems theory. There was a divide between his methodological orientation and his interest in the evolution of natural relationships. Toward the end of my doctorate, I took a seminar he offered on naturalistic research. It wasn't called qualitative research, but the psychological model for the course was doing experiments in the natural world. In this course, he introduced us to the idea of participant observation. [19]

The theorists I came to admire most were the so-called "soft" communication theorists. None of them were really in the field of communication. I'm thinking here of Gregory BATESON, an anthropologist; R. D. LAING, a psychiatrist, and the sociologist Erving GOFFMAN. These were the authors we read and discussed. So when I graduated, I had an intense, thorough grounding in research design and experimentation and also a grasp of social and cultural theory. The question was, "How do I bring the method and the theory together?" One of the first projects I did after graduate school was a case study of a task-oriented group composed of different personality types. I had a transcript of their conversation over the history of the group. I searched for a method for analyzing the discourse I gathered from this group. I recall being very frustrated because I wanted to be able to say something about the communication patterns in the group in a BATESONian way. But there were no legitimated methods at the time for doing this and I was still tied to the idea that I had to have a statistical analysis that justified any claims I made about patterns. Eventually I did a quantitative content analysis. But I was never satisfied with it. [20]

Around 1974, I picked up a book that a former colleague, Janet YERBY, recommended. It was written by anthropologist/psychiatrist Jules HENRY (1965) called *Pathways to Madness*. In many respects HENRY's book changed my life as a scholar and a teacher. I consider *Pathways to Madness* one of the two or three best books of the 20th Century in the social sciences. HENRY had lived with five families, each of which had an institutionalized child, to try to get at

questions about how these families affect children and the ways in which childhood pathologies may be rooted in family communication. His book consists of five essays that read like novels and are based on his field work in these families. When I finished his book, I said to myself, "This is what I want to do." There were no statistics in the book. HENRY immersed himself in the lives of each family and wrote detailed descriptions and analysis of what he experienced and what he thought it meant. [21]

2. Developing a Perspective

Stacy: Let's talk about the central questions that you've explored in your work as a qualitative researcher. [22]

Carolyn: When I started field work for *Fisher Folk*, I knew I was interested in how people put their lives together. Because this was a comparative community study, the questions I asked had to do with community social change and comparison of social structures, a level of analysis that I don't think is my strength. But it was good for me to have to think on a more macro level about such issues as the connection of center and periphery; the relationship of religion, community, and work; and the role of social change. [23]

Doing the *Fisher Folk* study helped me become a better social scientist. Otherwise, I would have just concentrated on how people negotiate face-to-face relationships—their identities within and outside of these relationships and the meanings we assign to them—topics I've always been interested in. So I moved from an initial emphasis on face-to-face personal relationships to communities and then later returned to social psychology in my study of emotions. [24]

Stacy: Is the macro perspective you took in the community study always present in your work? [25]

Carolyn: It's always in the background. I think having a macro sensibility makes me a better micro sociologist and communication scholar. [26]

Stacy: Does it help you connect larger, macro observations to the very specific emotion-centered aspects of your autoethnographic work? [27]

Carolyn: Definitely. When I write I have those different layers in mind. I look at and build on the connections. I think that's important in autoethnography. To bring in a social science perspective that considers structure, history, and process. [28]

Stacy: How about you, Art? [29]

Art: About the same time I read *Pathways to Madness*, I also read Clifford GEERTZ's (1973) *Interpretation of Cultures*, which was a very influential book for me, particularly his style of writing. GEERTZ and HENRY offered an invitation to integrate humanities with social sciences. Having always been interested in close relationships, this integration was a natural goal. It didn't seem to me that there

was any way to investigate the development of relationships over time through experiments, questionnaires, and surveys. That sort of research would always end up being quite superficial. [30]

Another thread I followed involved family therapists who were taking systems theory and applying it. Gregory BATESON'S research team (BATESON et al. 1957) filmed families talking to each other and schizophrenic children being interviewed in a psychiatric hospital. BATESON's team watched these films over and over again and then talked to each other about what they had seen. Their naturalistic method produced the double bind theory of schizophrenia. That fascinated me. The theory was grounded in tapes of people conversing naturally rather than in quantitative research. BATESON's (1972) notion that communication precisely was not the stuff of quantities influenced me tremendously. That and the distinction BATESON (1972) made between rigor and imagination—that quantitative social science was high on rigor but low on imagination. I would say that BATESON's work—along with HENRY and R.D. LAING's books (1967, 1970, 1971), which were filled with cases—influenced me the most. [31]

I began concentrating on synthetic writing when I was asked to do a chapter for the *Handbook of Rhetoric and Communication* (1984) on interpersonal bonding. I wanted to integrate 200 years of research on the consequences of communication in close relationships conducted by both quantitative and qualitative researchers including anthropologists, psychologists, and psychoanalysts. I enjoyed reading the case studies more than anything else. The works that were most admired in the field, on the other hand, were quantitative studies. So how do you bring those together? [32]

3. Changing Course

Stacy: What happened when you changed the course of your work and moved from doing quantitative studies to qualitative research that focused on experiential data and narrative inquiry? [33]

Art: This was big transition. The first 15 or 20 publications that I had as an assistant professor had all been quantitative studies. [34]

Stacy: Did you run into difficulties? Were people saying, "What's going on? You've changed"? [35]

Art: Colleagues didn't understand why I would change so radically and I lost some friends. But I gained a whole lot of new ones. [36]

Carolyn: So you started doing qualitative research—or thinking about it—in the late seventies? [37]

Art: The theoretical piece I did on interpersonal competence was in 1975. [38]

Carolyn: But you didn't do any qualitative work of your own until later? [39]

Art: I began by teaching courses in family communication from a qualitative perspective. I taught qualitative approaches in my first position at Temple University, but I wasn't sure who was going to publish qualitative research if I did it. [40]

Carolyn: Qualitative journals in sociology. [41]

Art: I didn't know about those journals. Besides I didn't consider myself a sociologist, and in communication the social psychology journals were most admired. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*—that's the journal everybody wanted to be published in because it signified they were doing rigorous social science. [42]

Carolyn: Now our students tend to publish in journals that have their origins in sociology. So, at least for our students, there has been a turn in communication from identification with psychology to identification with sociology and anthropology. [43]

I see a difference in your career and mine because I started in qualitative work in sociology; I identified myself as a qualitative researcher from the beginning. Thankfully, there was a qualitative professor in sociology at Stony Brook—Jerry SUTTLES, who studied communities. But there were many other professors who did qualitative work or were sympathetic to it, even if they didn't define themselves as qualitative researchers. [44]

Art: When I was finishing my Ph.D., departments were hiring their first quantitative researchers. I was hired at Temple in 1974 as the departmental methodologist and that meant that I taught statistics and research design courses. In 1976, the ICA—the International Communication Association—held one of its first international meetings in Berlin. I was invited to be on one of the keynote panels with Gerry MILLER and Charles BERGER. The papers from that panel were published in *Human Communication Research* (HCR), which was then a brand new journal. My paper for that program was called, "On Taking Ourselves Seriously" (1978). Half of the paper laid out the cleavage between what we say about communication—how it's defined as a process that changes over time ... and then how we study it—which seems to have nothing to do with the presumptions about what we say communication is. That publication marked my move away from quantitative research. Subtly I was saying, "If we really take ourselves seriously, we wouldn't be doing research this (quantitative) way." I was asking, "How concerned are we with being a legitimate science?" [45]

Narrative inquiry and autoethnography—the kind of qualitative research that Carolyn and I are interested in—pulls away from that obsession with science. We're not all that concerned with our status as scientists, at least I'm not. [46]

Carolyn: My transition to writing literary, autoethnographic work occurred much later, around 1985. I was going along, trying to be a systematic and rigorous scientist, as I had been trained to be. I was doing a social psychology study of jealousy at that point, trying to figure out how jealousy was experienced by surveying 350 undergraduates. In the middle of my SPSS analysis, my brother was killed. I was very depressed about losing my brother and, on top of that, my partner Gene [WEINSTEIN] was ill. My life seemed overwhelmed with death and loss. Given all this, I asked myself, "Why would I spend time thinking about undergraduates' responses to jealousy?" Life seemed too short. [47]

So my transition really started as, "I'm just going to sit here and write about what is going on in my life because I'm unable to get through this any other way." I started to write and was amazed at how the writing organized my thoughts and helped me set them aside and move on to what had to be done next. The process was *rationaly* therapeutic. As I'm doing this I'm also thinking that I'm writing some of the best sociology that I've ever written about relationships, institutions, process, and negotiation [see ELLIS (1993)]. Some of those GOFFMANesque processes I was interested in seemed to be happening in my writing. I realized that this may have been how GOFFMAN did what he did. He looked out at the world *from* his experience, though he didn't talk about it as being from his experience—he always presented himself as the observer observing, rather than the participant feeling. I wanted to add feelings and self vulnerability to this kind of work. [48]

As I identified my interest in emotions, I realized that emotions were something scientists rarely looked at. Psychologists looked at emotions in a detached, distanced experimental way but sociologists pretty much ignored them. I began investigating emotions and getting together with other sociologists interested in feelings. We started a division in sociology on emotion and many scholars expressed interest. The scientists and the more humanities-oriented sociologists joined us. I pushed to make the division more humanities oriented, which ran counter to the trends in sociology. [49]

At that point, I began an article on introspection as a social science methodology and my argument was that introspection was as scientific as any other method. I had a year-long sabbatical and I spent the whole time writing the article. When I sent it to a social psychology journal, the editors expressed interest, then rejected it, saying, "We're afraid that if we accept it we'll get all these little autobiographical pieces and we won't know what to do with them." [50]

So I sent the piece to *Symbolic Interaction*. I will never forget the review I received from Norman DENZIN, who said, "This person is schizophrenic. She makes the case for a humanities approach and then turns it against herself by trying to claim that this is social science." Those sentences—I have his exact quote in *Final Negotiations* (1995)—totally turned me around. Up to that point I had been arguing, "I'm a scientist, I'm a methodologist" and knocking on the mainstream sociology door, saying, "Please let me into your club." After this review, I changed my tune to, "It really doesn't matter what I'm called or what the

research is called, it matters what the work does." I turned away from knocking on the door and asking to be let in to asking, "Who do I want to speak to? Who wants to listen? And who wants to speak back?" I quickly found sociologists, scholars in a number of other disciplines, and many young people interested in similar issues about emotions, meaning, and experience. I committed myself then to talk to and respond to people doing this kind of meaning-making, meaning-seeking work. [51]

Stacy: As a way to create that change? [52]

Carolyn: Yes, to create change not within an institution but within a network of people. So we formed our own center instead of staying on the periphery of mainstream social science. My work continued to move more toward humanities, though with a social science flavor. I feel comfortable located at the intersection of humanities and social science. [53]

Stacy: What other kinds of things impacted the direction your work took? [54]

Carolyn: Another influence that was important to me was feminism—not only studying it but living it in the 70s and 80s in particular. I had strong female colleagues and role models for questioning the status quo and ultimately asserting alternate ways of knowing and being. Books such as *Women's Ways of Knowing* [Mary Field BELENKY et al. (1986)] and the interactions I had with my female cohort opened my thinking to consider and subscribe to a gendered way of knowing. I recognized that the way of knowing we typically celebrate is very masculine. It was like a light bulb went off and I felt I had the license and support to explore the things I was interested in exploring. [55]

4. Meeting Each Other

Stacy: When did you two meet and begin working together? How did you influence one another? [56]

Art: We met in January 1990. From the beginning I felt as if we were on the same wave length. She read everything I wrote and responded to it thoroughly as a friend and as a critic who had my best interests at heart. When we performed a scripted version of the beginning of our relationship at a seminar in Finland (2001), I emphasized the thoughts that ran through my head the first time I heard Carolyn speak, at a Colloquium in the College of Business (of all places). I said to myself, "She can't be saying these things. She's giving my talk!" Her conception of what social science can and should be is precisely what I've been thinking but I felt as if I were alone. Carolyn instantly lifted my spirits and gently nudged me to say what I was thinking and what I believed and to let the chips fall where they might. I was preparing the Oxford keynote lecture and I had experienced some hesitation in letting it all hang out so to speak. This became a big turning point for me. After that I didn't hesitate to use poetic and social science in the same sentence and my turn toward narrative inquiry was well on its way. Carolyn also was a gentle but persuasive critic of my narrative writing. She inspired me to

open up a wider sphere of emotionality in the stories I told and to allow my own voice to surface. Given my social science education, this was hard for me to achieve. I feel so fortunate to have been immersed in this long and enduring conversation with Carolyn that continues to evolve and change over time. We are kindred spirits and have a strong commitment to keep our conversation going. We're never completely sure where our conversation may lead but we have complete trust in the process. [57]

Carolyn: When I met Art, I felt I was working against the accepted canons in sociology, essentially alone. I was a very determined person, but I had no idea how what I was writing would be accepted, or if it would. When Art came along, my academic and personal life changed immediately. We became partners in every way. He not only supported what I did, he relished it and encouraged it. He would talk endlessly with me about what I was trying to accomplish and read and edit all my writing. He helped me hone my skills in telling a theoretical story, while still holding true to the accessible storied prose I valued. He made me question the defensive way I had learned to write. With him, I felt anything was possible. Together we were able to contribute to changing the focus of the conversation about doing research. Together we were able to do so much more than either of us could have done alone. We started an Institute for Interpretive Human Studies at our University, edited some special issues of journals, held a national conference on ethnographic alternatives, started a Division on Ethnography in the National Communication Association, and developed a book series together. We joined our resources and contacts from sociology and communication. We began to attract students and international colleagues to what we were doing. Together we were able to help legitimate interpretive and artistic social science. The conversations continued day and night, in the office and at home, at work and at play. We could not believe our good fortune at finding each other at the same university, two people with similar values and goals, dedicated to creating meaningful and useful writing and thinking, and feeling the same kinds of things. And the best part is that now, almost 15 years later, it just continues getting better. [58]

5. The Challenge of Doing Interesting Work

Stacy: What central challenges had to be managed and what "fights" were necessary in your efforts to transition to and to pursue qualitative research? [59]

Art: When Carolyn and I met we used to talk about what a mistake it is to be defensive about qualitative work. I think you should take for granted that it's important, that if it's good and makes people think and feel it can get an audience, and that there are different goals for different kinds of research. From the beginning I didn't think it was important to convince people who did the other stuff that they should do this stuff. We live in a world of differences. We need to understand and appreciate those differences. We should not be in the business of inhibiting what others want to do and the goal ought to be not to have others inhibit us either. [60]

I don't think qualitative research should be judged by what quantitative researchers think about it. I guess a lot of people used to worry about that but now qualitative research has its own momentum and as DENZIN and Yvonna [LINCORN] (2000) [have] said, the boundaries over which the paradigm wars were fought have been redrawn. There's already been a paradigm shift. Qualitative research is here to stay. On the other hand, you can't expect to take people who have built their entire careers on a certain orientation towards research and say, "What you're doing has no worth." They're going to be defensive and fight back, and I think that's happened in a lot of places. [61]

Carolyn: I still get asked, "So how is this work science?" My first response is, "I don't care whether you call it science or not. That argument is not important to me." [62]

Stacy: You're also saying that there are other questions you think are important to ask. [63]

Art: Yes. When I was invited to do the keynote address at a conference on personal relationships at Oxford, I knew that 90 percent of the people at the conference would be traditional, orthodox social psychologists. I centered the talk on the questions of how research on relationships was primarily research on ourselves and to what extent researchers are implicated in the interpretation of their data. I told a story about how when I stood back and looked at the theory I developed in "The Functions of Communication on Interpersonal Bonding" (1984) what I saw was the history of my own relationships. My history was revealed in my interpretation of 200 years of data on how people come together, the sources of interpersonal attraction, and what keeps people together. So I raised the question, "To what extent are we describing ourselves? The point was you can never really take the observer out of the observed. To a lot of social psychologists that's equivalent to heresy; if your methods can't be objective, what can you know? [64]

Colleagues at that conference were quite responsive to my ideas about writing personal stories, but the question they kept asking was, "How can we judge this?" "How do we know a good one when we see it?" "We can judge the statistics that suggest what the probability level of the findings would be, but how can we judge what is a useful story, what is a good story?" [65]

Carolyn: Around that same time, Art read my paper on introspection, which was published without the argument on why introspection was scientific investigation [see ELLIS (1991a)]. He also read another paper I'd written titled, "Emotional Sociology" (1991b). I began that paper with a discussion of previous research and the gaps it left and an argument about how my work filled a void and was, because of this, legitimate. And Art said, "I'd take all that out. You don't need to defend. Let the work show what it can do." [66]

That was another turning point for me. I had been taught that in order to protect yourself from criticism you begin with an argument about how your work is more

legitimate than what's come before. I don't do that anymore. I don't write defensively. I just try to write a good story. Now that doesn't mean I don't consult and refer to the literature; I do—just not in such a defensive way. I try to build on it rather than refute it. [67]

I also think that it's important not to be *offensive*, at least not self-consciously, to people who come from other perspectives. Rather, to say, "There is room for all of us. We're not suggesting that everybody should do this kind of work or that it answers all the questions. We're not going to promote our work by putting yours down." I think that is an interesting move when you say, "Let's just put my work out there," as opposed to offending or defending. [68]

Stacy: This happens everywhere. In rhetorical scholarship, for example, the pieces get positioned as an argument against some other way of interpreting the world. [69]

Carolyn: And it interests me how that philosophy actually limits critical debate. [70]

Art: What always puzzled me was why it's so difficult to grasp the range of different objectives in research. [71]

Stacy: Is it connected to this notion that you have to chart some new territory by coming up with a question that people aren't asking? That you make the case that your work is new and important? [72]

Carolyn: You are expected to make that argument. You also show you're smart by revealing what's wrong with the other perspective. Social science has not made room for multiple perspectives. The best most sociologists do in opening up to a variety of perspectives is to read or write sections in introductory sociology texts that list three sociological perspectives: conflict, functionalist, and (briefly) symbolic interactionist. Everything else then falls under those three headings. [73]

Art: Here's one way to contextualize differing perspectives on research: Traditional, orthodox quantitative research and experimental research and one strain of qualitative research are interested in predicting and controlling behavior. A second perspective is interpretive in which the investigator is interested in interpreting and understanding the social world. A third perspective is interested in criticizing, changing, and transforming political action. I don't see these perspectives in competition with each other. I don't know that they're even comparable. They're all legitimate. Perhaps some are easier to achieve than others and easier to judge. But instead of challenging other perspectives because your criteria don't fit their ways of doing things, why not just leave it there and concentrate on asking, "What are the questions that interest me and that are important? How can I go about answering those questions?" [74]

Carolyn: It's frustrating to some mainstream scholars that we are not in more of a fight. Still, we experience a lot of people talking about what's wrong with what we do. That means that something is going on in qualitative research that other

scholars are starting to pay attention to. They interpret us as saying, "Hey, we can go on without you, we don't need you." That's really frustrating to them. You can see that in many of the debates, such as in *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* where Norman DENZIN debated David SNOW [see SNOW (2002)]. [75]

Art: I resist the fight metaphor. I don't see this as a fight. I see my goal as continuing to do interesting work, getting it out there, and getting an audience for it. Besides if we can't agree on goals, how are we going to agree on how to judge whether the goals are achieved? [76]

6. Contributions: Creating Change and Writing Alternatives

Stacy: Let's discuss your contributions to qualitative work. Can we begin by talking about your work with students and the changes you've seen in the academy as a result? [77]

6.1 Teaching students and changing institutions

Carolyn: Once I and others began promoting a more literary approach to writing sociology, I started hearing from younger scholars in the field. At that time, no sociology department had a strong qualitative emphasis, though there were a few institutions where you could put together a qualitative committee. It was impossible *really* to create social change because we didn't have the opportunity. To change the field, qualitative Ph.D. students would have to get jobs in academia and then go on to train other people, the next generation of students. This was a flaw in what we hoped to do—we could not infiltrate the sociology programs that had Ph.Ds. Students from other schools would come to me and say, "I really want to do this kind of work, but my committee won't let me." I could give these students assistance and hints on how to do what they wanted, but until they graduated they were limited in the kind of work they could do. [78]

Art: That's a very good point in terms of how things have changed in the last 15 or 20 years. The primary change, I think, has been brought about by an influx of women and people of color into graduate programs and into leadership positions in academic disciplines. These students were naturally drawn to interpretive, critical, and qualitative research. They recognized that a lot of social research was about values and meanings and they wanted to do work that was meaningful in the context of their own living histories. That's why I'm optimistic about the future. These will be the academic leaders of the future. [79]

Carolyn: I agree. Debra AUSTIN [a former doctoral advisee of Art's] wanted to do scientific research, because that's how African Americans got ahead in academia. They learned the art—or the science—of being scientists. I remember having a long conversation with her about storytelling and oral traditions in African American families. I could see in her eyes that she was asking, "Do I dare trust this? I've had to hide all of that and pretend to be a scientist." She took that risk, grabbed hold of narrative and poetic writing and performance and ended up doing a very creative dissertation [see AUSTIN (1998)]. [80]

It's rare that I have heterosexual white men in my graduate classes. If a man attends, he's usually gay or a person of color. Without women and minorities and gay and lesbian students, I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing because nobody would be coming to take the courses. [81]

Art: Perhaps these students will generate an institutional analysis of the academy and what we value there. Every discipline wants, as Richard RORTY (1991) put it, a place at the trough. In the past that place was reserved for science because knowledge was equated with scientific knowledge. I think we need to better understand how the academy resists change and perpetuates conformity. What's interesting to me is that even in the most critical of social science theory the one institution we rarely look at intentionally is our own. We don't do ethnographies of universities and departments and disciplines, at least not very often. [82]

Carolyn: That would be hard to do. [83]

Art: Does that mean it shouldn't be done? [84]

Carolyn: No, it doesn't, but it is very difficult to write about your workplace. [85]

Art: One of the points that Dan ROSE (1990) makes in *Living the Ethnographic Life* is that the one institution we don't criticize is our own and also that primarily what we teach in graduate school is conformity. I thought that was a brilliant insight. [86]

As interpretive scholars get their feet in the door in more mainstream programs, it's just going to open up everything. And given the baby-boomer generation, the aging of America, the concern for personal experience—as well as the other side—the political orientation of cultural studies as it interfaces with interpretive, qualitative work—I think we're on the edge of a major shift. [87]

Carolyn: University of South Florida is very important in that shift. I don't want to make us sound more important than we are, but our communication program is one of the few programs in the world that's totally qualitative. We are producing really good Ph.D. students who are getting decent jobs. The next hurdle is for more of them to get jobs in Ph.D. programs, where they will be in positions to train other Ph.D.s. I see the possibility of that happening in communication more than it ever seemed possible in sociology. That was a major reason I moved from a sociology department to a communication department. I wanted to be part of that movement. [88]

Art: That brings us back to the question of how the graduate curriculum should change in these disciplines. That's where writing comes in. Stacy, you're teaching performative writing, I'm teaching a writing workshop, Carolyn is teaching autoethnographic writing. Exposure to good writing is a novel idea in graduate education. I like Laurel RICHARDSON's (2000) point about how little that is published in orthodox, mainstream journals is actually *read*. [89]

Stacy: And how important it is that people think about their *writing*. [90]

Art: And think about themselves as writers. We had two fantastic sessions in my class this semester raising that question: "What if you thought of yourself as a writer?" We "train" graduate students to think of themselves as researchers, as intellectuals. But up to this point we have never had a mission to have them think of themselves as writers and to live as writers. What is the life of a writer? [91]

6.2 Ethnographic alternatives

Art: That's part of what we've tried to do in the development of the book series, *Ethnographic Alternatives*—to emphasize writing and to get academics to see themselves as writers. Mitch ALLEN, who started AltaMira Press after having been a very successful Sage sociology editor for a long, long time, was instrumental in the development of that series. He supported us. He gave us license and freedom to publish works that we believed in, sometimes without any strong evidence of who the audience was going to be for those books. In designing the series, our idea was, again, not necessarily to work *against* mainstream orthodox research goals as much as to open up a whole new range of possibilities for people who wanted to think first about writing accessible prose, telling stories, writing from the heart, being reflexive, being in their own work. [92]

Breaking down disciplinary boundaries is a more subtle but also an important goal of the series. Our authors are anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and communication and performance studies scholars. [93]

Carolyn: Though they're mainly communication and performance studies. [94]

Art: Yes, of the 16 books published in the series, 11 are written by communication and performance scholars. [95]

Carolyn: Some of those cross disciplines. Like me [see ELLIS (2004)], and Laurel RICHARDSON and Ernest LOCKRIDGE (2004). Besides Laurel and me, there's Mary LAGERWEY (1998). [96]

Stacy: That surprises me—that there aren't more sociologists. [97]

Art: Why is that? My answer would be that most of the manuscripts we get from sociologists aren't there yet. We reject most of them. [98]

Stacy: Why? [99]

Art: That comes back to what you were saying before, Carolyn, about how change occurs in the academy. Sociology has been very slow to open the door to more forms of representation that depart from orthodox conventions of social science writing. [100]

7. Looking to the Future

Stacy: Can we talk about the future of qualitative research? [101]

Carolyn: One development I think is intriguing is the interest in qualitative research from across the world. It's normal for me to get five or six e-mails a week from people in other countries saying, "I want to know more." Often they're generic questions like, "I'm doing a dissertation. Do I have to do a literature review?" Or, "How should I start? How can I convince my committee that this is an okay thing to do?" Sometimes the e-mails are from established scholars seeking to make contact. They're getting our books and reading them and then they want to ask questions. I would like to start a list serve to connect all the people who want to talk about autoethnography, history, narrative, literature, performance, and art as ethnography. It would be wonderful to have our own website. [102]

Another exiting possibility is the growing number of international conferences on qualitative research. I just went to one in Denmark [The Humanities–Sense or Nonsense Conference sponsored by The Danish Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and the research network Gender, Constructionism and Discourse]. Five feminist women from various disciplines—mostly education and sociology—organized the conference to raise questions about social science and to learn about and engage in alternative, creative, and communal forms of scholarship. [103]

Stacy: And you're going to Beijing? [104]

Carolyn: Yes. We've been invited to a conference on Journalism and Communication and to give a workshop on qualitative methods at Beijing Broadcasting University. They want to know about qualitative research generally because it is a fairly new practice in China. [105]

Art: It's interesting to see the developments in countries like Australia where interest in educating their own Ph.D.s is growing. It used to be that Australians came to the US if they wanted to get Ph.D.s. Now more and more they're educating their own. Because they've gotten into doctoral education much later, there seems to be a greater openness to qualitative approaches. We're frequently asked to serve on dissertation committees for Australian students. And of course the interest in qualitative research in Canada is strong. We did a workshop on personal narrative in Vancouver [ELLIS and BOCHNER (2000) "Teaching with Personal Narratives" at the Conference on Learning Love: Articulating a Space for Love and Compassion in the Teaching and Healing Arts, University of British Columbia, Vancouver] and a workshop on qualitative methods in Pretoria, South Africa [ELLIS and BOCHNER (1998) Workshop on Qualitative Methods, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa]. And Carolyn did one in Edmonton [(1999) Workshop on Qualitative Methods, International Conference Advances in Qualitative Methods, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada]. [106]

Carolyn: And one in Toronto [ELLIS (2003) "How Stories Teach: Emotionality and Vulnerability in Health Communication," an invited talk for Grand Rounds at the University of Toronto, Community Health Systems Resource Group, The Hospital for Sick Children, Population Health Science Group, and Qualitative Research Group]. [107]

Art: In addition to the increased interest in artful approaches to qualitative research, these conferences also show that the health fields are ripe for narrative approaches. [108]

Carolyn: And narrative ethics. [109]

Stacy: And the connections to education ... [110]

Carolyn: Yvonna LINCOLN and Norman DENZIN's work on *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* and journals such as *Qualitative Inquiry*, *Cultural Studies-Critical Methodologies*, and *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, among others, made an opening for education scholars to do more qualitative research. [111]

Art: So, as I said, the future looks bright. [112]

Carolyn: Until the next revolution when the young people trained to be interpretivists come out and say, "Oh, we've got to learn to be scientists." [113]

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