Chapter 14

Partnership Research in Health Promotion

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When I began preparing this paper I was puzzled by the increasing popularity of "partnership" on the agendas of health promotions conferences. In part, the topic of partnership has arisen because health promotion has moved from a practice paradigm of community education to one of community development, and this calls for new working relationships. Partnership is also part of the discourse underlying the shift from medical/scientific orientations in health to holistic/social action orientations. The methods and assumptions that supported ecological research, treatment research, or even much of rehabilitation research no longer hold when the end product of health promotion—healthy people and healthy communities—is not achievable by manipulating concrete intervening variables. We have become more open to partnerships as a way of exploring new paradigms.

To support the goals of health promotion we need to address how people change the way they see themselves and relate to each other in the many roles they play in their families, workplaces, communities, and in the health care systems they encounter. The study of personal and social growth is veritable unknown territory for it touches the personal concepts of people that are hidden, protected, and highly resistant to change. However, before we enter into new endeavours, we must know ourselves as researchers and deconstruct the social enterprise of our research practice. Where there is an entrenched power imbalance between parties, there can be no partnership—in health promotion as in all other aspects of life. This is nowhere clearer than in partnership research. We need to look at the hard won and coveted sources of power that we protect in our research practice before we can address issues of power and power shifts in the next generation of research.

A partnership wherein subjects are deeply involved in all aspects of research challenges existing role relationships but invites new possibilities. The following

conceptualization is an attempt to understand research, not according to current theory and practice, but through our motivation for doing research. Figure 1 identifies the underlying assumptions, the respective roles of academic researchers and subjects, and the indicators of quality within each of the three major approaches. The term subject is used here to denote the active, participative agent who is the expert in the topic because of his or her lived experience. The ideas initially grew from Gergen and Gergen's (1984) work in identifying the three ways psychologists look at change: as a search for stable laws, as the study of developmental change processes, and as the study of change as part of the chaotic interaction of contextual factors. These three approaches resonate with the paradigms that underlie much of our experience in health promotion and community development.

A shared or compatible research agenda enables a shared or compatible research product. If all parties are aware of the motivation for conducting research, it becomes feasible to move from the restrictions of formalized roles such as "researchers," "practitioners," or "community members" to shared visions and complementary actions. In the past, only one of the parties has been called the "researcher" and others had to position themselves within that agenda. That is not to imply that researchers do not have important roles, but to label only one type of role as research automatically devalues the other contributors to research from the areas of practice and community action. Perhaps we might be better served by calling one group "academic" researchers, and the other groups "research practitioners" or "community action researchers," or other such terms, so that different research agendas, roles, and responsibilities can be accommodated.

The first column in Figure 1 depicts the search for stable laws and theories. The roles that characterize most empirical research are represented by this agenda. The researcher's role is dominant and the methods employed control the interaction between the subjects and the researcher to protect the objectivity and detachment of the research process. Large groups are used to minimize the natural variation in responses that occur because of individual differences and contexts. Subjects are not considered reliable sources of information without corroboration. Subjects are often reassured that their individual presence will not even be detected. This practice is not only counterproductive within much of the health promotion field, it reinforces the power imbalances within society.

Researchers through their analyses and reports define the meaning of responses and findings, whereas respondents have no opportunity to comment upon interpretation of their words and intentions. This way of doing research takes away from respondents their right to "name" their world (Freire, 1970). Stated somewhat extremely and from the perspective of respondents, interview research, by excluding

Figure 1. Roles and Practices According to Motivation for Conducting Research

	Search for Principles	Search for Better Practice	Understanding and Influencing Power
	Search for stability, for the laws that explain human behaviour across environments/ events	Search for order, to predict the developmental process of change	Search for definitions of change within contexts
Goal/Role of Researcher	Researcher's goal is to be part of the debate about empirical knowledge within the scientific/academic community	Researcher's goal is to improve practice by understanding and altering the rate of change.	Researcher's goal is to support change within society by introducing groups to the impact of social construction
Subject's Role	The subject is a self-contained individual, operating according to discoverable laws. Large groups of subjects are required to control for individual and contextual variation	1) Subjects who are "experts" in the conditions being studied. 2) Practitioners who intervene with "unable" persons	1) Those with power are challenged and considered hostile witnesses (deconstruction research) 2) Those without power become co-researchers (social action research) or the researcher may align with the group

Figure 1 (Continued). Roles and Practices According to Motivation for Conducting Research

Context	Environment is a confounding influence and therefore to be controlled	Environment is part of change and therefore to be manipulated	Environment is the focus of study, power exists within context
Quality/ Standards	Generalizability, replication, and the extent to which the research supports or challenges existing theory	Usefulness: Clarity of description of subject (person or practitioner), environment, and process	Relevance and comprehensiveness, style and communication are key

the biographical rooting and contextual grounding of respondents' personal and social webs of meaning, bears a resemblance to a degradation ceremony or an identity stripping process (Mishler, 1986, p.122).

This research agenda has been common in medicine, health, and health promotion for it depicts our hopes for tangible realities that can be measured, predicted, and controlled. Training for researchers has been grounded within this domain and has led to highly sophisticated and elegant research models that yield important details about the workings of the "structured tissue" level of health. The physical body lends itself to the study of natural science variables. This model has been adapted to research that attempts to determine patterns of responses or attitudes through large scale surveys and demographic studies.

There is little role for partnership in most quantitative research although increasingly subject groups, in the forms of reaction panels, focus groups, or consumer response groups, are invited to comment on aggregated data. There is, however, an increasing urgency on the part of funding bodies to involve all sectors and stakeholders in setting the research agenda. The Canadian Breast Cancer Forum in 1993, the intensive work by breast cancer survivors in Long Island, and the research involvement of the AIDS community are excellent examples of what can happen when "subjects" force the research agenda. However, we must expect that in research where the agenda is to search for stable laws, the voices of subjects and subject groups will be resisted. These voices challenge the underlying epistemologi-

cal assumptions of quality and standards which demand objectivity and control. To listen to the individual and collective voices is to remove the essence of detached interaction and to confound the search for universal laws with individual and contextual factors.

If we now look at column three, the search for ways to influence power, we see a research agenda that is diametrically opposed to column one. This column captures the two distinct traditions that use research to understand change as a means of altering existing power balances. Both are based on the ideas of social construction. Critical research is based on critical or Marxist social theory and exhorts the researcher to use his/her skills to challenge the existing power bases within society in order to achieve social empowerment for disenfranchised groups (Fay, 1987; Parker, 1992; Wexler, 1983). The researcher uses science to reduce the power of the power elite in order to allow more democratic forms of public power to emerge. This role is not one that easily generates ongoing relationships between researchers and subjects. In fact the extensive use of depersonalized texts within discourse analysis (a major methodology of critical psychology) reinforces this distance. Critical research and deconstruction research have not been embraced by health promotion practitioners. However this research is often used by critics of health systems. The roles these critics play are part of the shift to health from illness for they "name" the enemy and lay the discourses of medical systems open to public scrutiny.

Participatory action research (PAR) is much more familiar to most health promotion researchers for it has become an important tool in community development. To some, PAR may seem an uncomfortable bedfellow with critical research in this third column but PAR shares with critical research a strong motive to use research to alter power balances. Within PAR the traditional role of the academic researcher is subsumed within the will of the group and all members of the group are considered equal. In the process of enlightenment there can only be participants (Habermas, 1971). All action research is essentially a grass roots approach to the solution of community problems. Research provides a social setting where people can work together, dream together of a better community, and try to translate their dreams into the language of action and evaluation. This is a far cry from the power differentials of empirical research. Action research empowers by promoting group belonging, fostering creativity and critical thinking, promoting change and growth, and serving as a means of resolving social conflicts. However, the results of action research seldom become part of the scientific community because the energy is directed toward communicating the information within that community. The quality of this approach is not measured by the contribution to common theoretical debate or knowledge but by its ability to promote growth and change within the group (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991).

Column two in Figure 1, the search for better practice, represents a middle ground of motivation. It has seldom been seen as a separate approach, for theory and methods are often drawn from the other two columns. Column two represents the applied research of education, counselling, health education, and rehabilitation where the study of change is motivated by the desire to improve practice. It is here that the power of research partnerships in health promotion takes on life and new meaning. In practice-related research, there are three types of partnerships. In the first instance, partners are the individuals and consumer groups such as poverty coalitions, breast cancer survivors, smokers, single moms, or people with type A personalities. We can work with people who were successful in achieving changes in health to uncover how they accomplished the changes and just as easily, we can work in partnership with those who have not been successful for they are also experts in the conditions and lifestyles that need to be understood. Because these partners naturally share a common research agenda to improve health and well-being, methods that recognize and validate the expertise of each partner can be easily developed.

When the partners are those charged with intervention there is also a rich history of partnerships. Teachers, nurses, and support workers in the community have all established research partnerships to study practice. In England, the field of action research in education has a rich and extensive history of academic research-ers and teacher researchers working together to explore and extend practice. In one of the more exciting developments, Jennifer Gore (1993) combines the traditions of British action research and American critical theory using a feminist framework.

Nurses have taken a lead role in the development of grounded theory research, for grounded theory is particularly suited to understanding processes that change over time and circumstance (Chenitz & Swanson, 1983; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Some examples of such processes are geriatric remotivation (Hutchinson & Webb, 1988); moving to a nursing home (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986); living with condi-tions such as emphysema (Fagerhaugh, 1973); and chronic illness and pain (Fagerhaugh, 1973). Hutchinson (1987) tackles the important features of personal and emotional self care for nurses in high stress positions thereby providing a model for understanding the practice of nursing from the perspective of both the recipient of care and the caregiver.

While grounded theory does not deal directly with partnerships per se, it does provide a research framework that encourages all stakeholders to become involved in the research process. Team members, academic researchers, and those who live the experience all have important parts to play in unravelling the process being studied. In concluding this section, there are many methods available to address the questions of health promotion, as there are many potential partners. Clarification of

research agendas empowers all parties to become involved in meaningful and relevant ways.

Establishing Partnerships in Research: One Example

After 20 years of research I suspect that many of the results that researchers attribute to theoretical realities can be explained by the process and the implied expectations of the research endeavour itself (Brenner, Brown & Canter, 1985; Brenner, Marsh & Brenner, 1978; Collett, 1976). I believe that research partner-ships might add new dimensions to current practice because of my experience with social action research in the Independent Living (IL) Movement. IL is a partnership of disabled people, their friends, and the professionals who support them. All work together in partnership to ensure citizenship and quality of life. IL is distinctly different from traditional models of rehabilitation where the professional is the expert and the disabled person a thankful recipient of service. IL is also very different from social advocacy wherein disabled persons assert their rights to speak for themselves. During my activities while founding the Canadian Centre for the Study of Empowerment of Canadians with Disabilities, I became convinced that the partnerships I had experienced in IL could be a model for a new form of partnership research because the role imbalances in traditional research practice seemed very similar to the power differentials in rehabilitation. Just as IL created new challenges and options for professionals and disabled people, so I believed that a partnership in research might create new forms of understanding for researchers and subjects.

The following is a brief account of a study of the evolution of a partnership method that evolved in research designed to understand how new ideas sometimes change the way people see themselves and relate to each other. The topic incorpo-rates both empowerment and social invention. Empowerment, the action of gaining or granting power, speaks to the processes whereby people, individually or collectively, achieve greater control over their lives. A social invention is a new and imaginative way of tackling a social problem or improving quality of life (Albery, 1986). Social inventions may be "laws, organizations or procedures that change the ways in which people relate to themselves or to each other" (Conger, 1974, p.1). Thus, the study addresses a subset of social change—innovations that influence people's ability to realize personal or group aims.

I set out to explore "empowerment" in ways that would challenge traditional power imbalances in research. While conducting the research I had the opportunity to visit a number of universities to present seminars on my work. I spoke to sociologists, educators, psychologists, and discourse analysts. While most were intrigued by the research, they had strong reactions to the idea of working partner-ships with subjects that extended beyond data collection. Some reacted as if

partnership implied consorting with the enemy, a threat to academic freedom, or an abdication of academic responsibility. The feminist researchers I spoke to considered partnership a fond but elusive dream.

The study took place in a number of settings in Britain, Canada, and the United States where groups of people experienced a social change that had an impact on their personal lives. The sources of information included: a series of training co-operatives called Greenbank, in Liverpool; the modern hospice movement, as exemplified by St. Christopher's in London; the experiences of writer and advocate David Brandon who worked with homeless people, people with chronic psychiatric concerns, and people with mental handicaps; Disabled Peoples' International, with headquarters in Winnipeg, Manitoba; Human Rights Guardianship legislation in Alberta, Canada; and tribal changes in native child welfare policy of the Siksika Nation, Alberta, Canada. The partners included the people who were catalysts in the change, those affected by the changes, and me, an academic researcher.

Most subjects were involved over a period of three years. They and the people involved with the invention became the living laboratories of the study. Through hours of interviews, site visits, and sessions with their families, staff, and clients, they became researchers of their own experience. We were able to document how they, as equal partners, found ways to collect, analyze, and interpret data. In the process, we uncovered knowledge that was meaningful both for an academic audience and the groups studied. In a way, we lived a social invention about research as we explored new partnership roles.

I chose to use grounded theory as the general framework for the study because I anticipated that the methods would have to evolve and expand as the study progressed. We started with a fairly traditional qualitative interviewing approach using feminist principles. I employed methods that encouraged an open sharing of ideas and reciprocity but soon encountered serious difficulties. The transcripts and the forms of analysis available posed barriers to partnership. The partners felt increasingly alienated, for although we spent time together, most of the work was my work. The process of abstraction in concept analysis also distanced the subject from his/her own material because many of the codes were, in fact, codes that arose from my background and reading.

When I sat back to analyze what was happening, it seemed that we kept talking because neither I nor the others knew when we had finished. I began to imagine that I was trapped in a force field defined by collecting data and understanding it through more interviews, but now the process was called interpretation, even though it felt like data collection. We continued to circle until we had gathered enough momentum to escape the force of the field or gave up in exhaustion. My feelings about the search for meaning were coming close to those expressed by Rommetveit (1978) in discussing the plight of the enlightened layperson struggling to improve

his/her own capacity to understand and make him/herself understood within the games of research: ". . . his [the subject's] initial pride turning to despair and alienation while I as the scholar of human communication pursued the trade with scientific rigour, formal elegance and academic success within the convenient fiction of joint construction of meaning" (p. 17).

Working together was becoming a chore for both of us and I had come face to face with reality as stated by Gluck and Patai (1991): "Narrators typically are not true partners in the process. Whatever control they exercise during the interview, when they are able to negotiate the terrain, usually ends once the session is completed" (p. 2). Gluck and Patai go on to assert that, although narrators are occasionally consulted prior to publication, the interviewer/scholar maintains "the work of framing, presenting, interpreting, analyzing and making the work public" (p. 3). They conclude that feminist scholars contribute to the collectivity of women but their actual practice has maintained the real separation between narrator and interviewer.

As we discussed the difficulties we were experiencing, it became apparent that the participants had particular gifts related to understanding the nature of partnership research. They had agreed to participate in the study only after understanding the scope of the research, their role in negotiating topics, and their role in the use of the material. The participants were high profile people with much to lose and the topics covered could be potentially damaging— both personally and professionally. They needed assurance that their information would be treated with respect and their ideas not squandered. What was needed was a process whereby we could capitalize on the implicit expectation of a contract. It seemed logical and natural in this circumstance to investigate a social contract that could help us clarify the steps to be taken.

The parties (the subjects and the researcher) in most research experiences assume roles even if the roles are seldom defined as such. The subject has information that the researcher needs and the researcher's task is to convince the subject to share that information. The subject, if he/she is willing to contribute to the advancement of knowledge, still has to weigh the potential risks of commitment and disclosure (Brenner, 1978; Ginsberg, 1978; Miller, 1972; Mixon, 1971). The social contract that was created for this particular study consisted of an informal negotiation process that clarified what each of the parties brought to the research enterprise and what each hoped to achieve. This is represented in Figure 2, a social contract framework.

The contracting process was adapted from a training contract (Marlett & Hughson, 1978) and it created the opportunity to openly discuss activities and interactions, quality standards, and products. The subject and the researcher became active participants in creating new options instead of being limited to one prescribed

Figure 2. A Social Contract Framework: The General Roles and Products in Partnership Research

	Give	Get
Subject	Information and personal perspectives	Respect and involvement
Researcher	Valuing subject's contribution	Data and interpretations

research approach. Rather than trying to negotiate a global contract for the research, we negotiated our roles throughout the tasks of the research. These tasks occurred within four general and interconnected stages in the research process: data collection, analyzing data, interpretation, and generating or disseminating theory. The negotiation at each stage began by defining and agreeing to the tasks at hand. We could then define our respective roles in relation to the task, the anticipated product of each task and how each of us would know when the process was finished. From this we could also judge the quality of our work in completing the task and the product that resulted. This was a verbal process, captured on tape and thus available in the transcripts for reference.

Data Collection

Data collection was an easily identified process because most of the subjects had been interviewed in the past and were familiar with evaluative research. They were comfortable with the different methods used to collect data in the study—interviews, observations, use of documents—and thus the data collection contract held no surprises. The purpose of the contract, as illustrated in Figure 3, was to secure relevant and accurate information. In this, the researcher provided the opportunity and means for the subjects to explore, discover, and learn about themselves and the topic. The subjects committed to explore and share their experiences and ideas within their limits of trust and safety. Any agreements to disclose information were governed by the balance between the benefits and the inherent risks to the subjects. In this study the risks were increased because we could not rely on the protection of anonymity.

Every effort was made to establish and maintain an informality in collecting data. Subjects set the pace and were free to expand on topics or issues that they felt

Figure 3. A Social Contract in Data Collection: A Contract for Honest and Complete Data on the Topic

	Give	Get
Subject	Information on topic Commitment to explore and disclose experience relevant to topic	Recognition of expertise and experience related to topic Respect and social contact Extension of knowledge about topic and research Product that presents information in an understandable form
Researcher	Opportunity to be part of a research process Opportunity to tell about and discuss one's experience Knowledge about topic related to the research Preparation of transcripts and data summaries	Opportunity to explore topic with a person who had direct experience or knowledge Recognition of expertise and experience as a researcher Information related to topic Self-awareness as a researcher

were important. It was common for the subjects to ask questions and for me to share material from other sources. Subjects were asked to comment on the process and whether they felt safe and comfortable with the information disclosed. If a topic was too sensitive, it was removed, deferred, or approached in alternative ways. In all instances, subjects were invited to include others in data collection in order to explore alternative perspectives. For some subjects, this meant the casual involvement of a spouse or family members; for others, formal group interviews with co-workers and the people directly involved in the social invention were arranged. Interviews took place in a location chosen by each subject. Interviews were taped throughout the entire research process to provide a record of the evolving methods.

A final product of the data collection stage was the transcript. The transcription method is included here because it provided an important breakthrough in the extension of partnership beyond the interview. Transcripts were produced using a technique designed specifically for the study. Words were typed directly as heard from the tape and a new line was started at each breath or pause in the conversation. This created a written representation of oral conversation. It looks and reads more like a conversation than traditional text. The following is an example of the final format as transcribed from a tape with Jean Isley Clarke. She is talking about the structure of the Family Esteem workshop cooperatives throughout North America.

> **J:** It's an empowering structure
> how it works
> I don't know
> I know how it works here in Minneapolis
> where I run it
> but
> I don't know how it works in Calgary
> and that was part of the trust
> in giving it away
> and
> some places
> it just goes s s s s s s s s
> and nothing happens
> and in other places
> somebody takes it
> and creates something all new
> (Jean Isley Clark, Session #2, 1991, p. 21)

The procedure for creating transcripts enabled the subjects to own their transcripts as part of an ongoing oral interaction. We effectively postponed the formalization of our interaction as formal, written text and this enabled us to "play" with the data longer. The social contract of data collection was considered complete when subjects saw and felt comfortable with their transcripts.

Analysis

The definition of, and contract for, analysis proved to be the turning point of the study and marked the departure from grounded theory and other qualitative research practices. After much study and discussion, analysis was defined as examining the data in order to locate, in detail, the elements in the data and their relationships. The contract was thus focused on deciphering and proofing the data

and on increasing the reliability of the information gathered. This was to be accomplished by breaking down the data in order to ensure that the elements or units were complete and correct. Figure 4 represents the framework for the analysis contract.

Figure 4. A Social Contract in Analysis: A Contract for Reliable Data

	Give	Get
Subject	Verification of correctness and completeness of the data Agreement on elements, their groupings or order	Security that information is not distorted or changed Involvement in the research process
Researcher	Preparatory work in finding analysis processes that the subject can relate to Opportunity to be involved in the process	Visibility and verification of the data Subjects' perspectives on the data Security in the elements and their integrity

In the contract it was the researcher's responsibility to prepare the data so that the subject could carry out his/her tasks related to evaluating reliability. The potential benefits for each party were sizable. The subject felt secure in the treatment of the data and the researcher felt secure because everything possible had been done to ensure reliable data before proceeding to interpretation. In order to complete the contract we had to find processes to break down the data. This involved the tasks of identifying types of elements or units to be used, agreeing on what an element consisted of, and verifying completeness and correctness of the information contained within each element. The end product was a document that presented the breakdown of the data into discrete elements, ordered according to an agreed upon structure and in a form that was agreeable to the subject and to myself.

The search for methods of analysis became a six month quest to find a way to derive units from qualitative data. Conceptual analysis, life course analysis, conversational analysis, structure analysis, movement analysis, and anteced-ent/consequent analysis were all tried but none fostered the partnership. Stories were eventually chosen as units of analysis because subjects could relate to stories and work with them. The analysis of the transcripts into story units led to simple verification procedures.

The contract for analysis was complete when all the information (transcripts, observations from the site visits, interviews with collaborators, and documents) were presented in story units. The stories were summarized by title, page reference, and a brief list of story themes. Story chains were constructed enabling the subjects, and those they chose to involve, to see and work with the elements of their data more easily. Subjects were invited to add stories that had been missed, combine or separate stories, or delete stories that were not relevant to the topic.

The processes were open, concrete, and transparent and led to productive and comfortable working relationships. Both parties knew what was expected and when the task was complete. The partnership process was effective and affirming. Subjects had come to feel a certain security in the handling of their stories because they could see and understand each of the steps in the process. Subjects came to believe that their information was respected, that there was a deliberate search for truth and that their stories would not be distorted. This was particularly important for those subjects who had been misquoted or misrepresented in the past.

Interpretation

In the early stages of the research we worked to capture historical truth. Historical truth lies in a story that can be recognized by those who have lived it because of its integrity. Historical truth is truth as seen, experienced, and recalled. We had done this through the honest and complete documentation of events, ideas, and feelings. Now we had to deal with "narrative truth" wherein the story is true regardless of its historical veracity because of the meaning the story conveys to people (Spense, 1982). In the search for narrative truth, the stories were no longer products in and of themselves but were tools in an ongoing interpretive process that used the stories to uncover topic related information. We defined interpretation as the process of finding relationships between the stories that added to our under-standing of the intention, purpose, or impact of the topic.

Interpretation brought an unexpected dimension to the practice of research for me. In quantitative research I was accustomed to turning data over to an impartial computer analysis to find significance in the patterns of numbers. Once the statistical analysis was completed, significance was established. Subjects were not involved with the statistical process and the role of the researcher was limited to

presenting the findings and suggesting how they related to other results and to the theory in question. In my experience with evaluative research and social action research, the scope of the interpretation was predetermined by the method being used. None of these experiences seemed relevant to the work we now faced. While our roles had been different and discrete in the search for historical truth, we were now fellow observers and interpreters as we moved beyond documenting stories to understanding the topic through stories. We had to evolve and improvise our respective roles and rules of conduct as we went along, as represented in Figure 5.

Figure 5. A Social Contract in Interpretation: A Contract for Social and Contextual Validity

	Give	Get
Subject	Contextual validity through historical, social, personal, and cultural validity Social validity Increased options for interpretation	Increased personal understand-ing through reframing events and experience
Researcher	Process for identifying various perspectives that relate to the information Recognition of subjects' lifeworlds and contributions	Contextual and social validity Fresh insights Dense data Categories for further explora-tion

In this contract there are two related goals: social validity and contextual validity. Social validity was enhanced because the process and the product were personally meaningful to the subjects because of their ongoing involvement. The

contract also framed the tasks of interpretation within the contextual boundaries created by our respective experiences. Contextual validity was a term which I coined to recognize the underlying meaning inherent in context (historical, social, personal, and cultural). For example, the results of a study of mother/infant interaction would take on particular meaning if the study was conducted in an intensive care nursery, and very different meaning if the study was conducted within the home. When the context is identified, readers have important reference points that ground their understanding.

The tasks involved developing methods that capitalized on the strength and breadth of our combined experience and our complementary perspectives. The benefits of partnership during interpretation were great. The subjects had an opportunity to reframe their experiences according to a number of perspectives, including their past and their culture. The researcher, through sharing interpretation with informed subjects, can broaden the interpretive base and thereby ensure that alternate meanings are recognized and integrated into the final products.

We began by discussing what each of us brought to the process of interpretation. Brown and Sime's (1981) work on the expertise of explainers provided a framework to discuss the degree, amount, and type of involvement each of us had with the topic. We also discussed how our shared experience extended the boundaries of possible interpretation to include our combined personal, social, cultural and historical perspectives. This process also helped me to define the potential for generalizing our interpretations. My role included the development of methods and procedures that would engage both of us in a shared search for meaning. The subject's role was to approach each exercise with openness to different perspectives and to identify as many interpretations as possible.

As we started to work with stories, I was unprepared for the openness, the mutuality, and the reciprocity that ensued. It was as if the stories had created a familiarity and trust that made it possible to understand our research roles at a new level. The following transcript, taken directly from a tape of the interpretation session, and therefore not presented in the usual transcript format, captures this familiarity:

G: At the beginning I must confess that you were asking questions and I was wondering if my rabbiting on would give you any information that would be of any use to you at all and then I stopped doing that very early on. I was constantly thinking about what I'm saying and what meaning it may have to your research. It might have been a botched up job.

N: You know, I don't think researchers realize just how much people do just that— that people are trying to give us what we want. I think that

may be the reason why so much research is shit. We never sit down and say this is the area I'm interested in and be honest with you. You end up spending your time guessing what my agenda is.

G: It's almost like a bedpan syndrome. You've been interviewed by so many professionals who are wanting to prove a theory. Not really searching for new stuff but wanting to prove a theory and you see that when somebody's eyes start glittering or their voice changes— it says yeah tell me a little more about that and you think oh shit I've got it right haven't I and then you get the disappointment in their eyes and you think oh now I've done it. That wasn't happening 'cause I quite enjoyed telling my stories to be quite honest.

N: There were times when I thought I should be directing it more. I finally thought it's time to just watch where this goes. There were pages where all I got in was an "uum" and . . .

G: I couldn't believe that you'd wrote it out almost word for word. I guess you just need practice and a chance to look at what things might mean.

N: One of the stories that I wanted to interpret with you is a story that happened a long time ago and it will be a challenge to get back into it. I'd like to talk about what roles we might take in this. I'll need to be guided by you.

G:OK lead us into it. There's so much in my mind that it just seems to come out.
(Gerry, interpretation tape, 1991)

Theory

In qualitative research, at least in this study, the line between interpretation and theory is very faint. The definition of theory used with the subjects was simply a scheme of ideas that explained practice or experience. Theory includes the tasks of making theory and the transmission of results to others. I had come to believe that theory was dependent on the purpose of the research and the audience targeted. From this conceptualization, there would appear to be three main audiences for theory depending on the purpose of the research.

1.   The community of academic peers who judge and reward the researcher within the debates of the current theories in the discipline. I was concerned about this audience because the final product had to speak to an interdisciplinary academic community. This paper is an example of academic theory dissemination.

2.   Practitioners who seek knowledge to improve their practice and who will judge the theory by its applicability and usefulness. The concepts of empowerment and change are particularly relevant to human service professionals who must learn

about change and new ideas if they and those they serve are to survive the turmoil of change. A case book has been prepared to assist students and practitioners to understand and apply the practice issues that arose from the study.

3. The target group who judge the quality of the theory according to its relevance to their personal, social, and cultural lives. This audience was represented by people who were affected by the social invention and empowerment that resulted. The stories of each of the sites have been prepared for use by them and a popular edition based on the stories of the social inventors and their experiences is in preparation.

The contract in Figure 6 represents just one of the potential audiences, the target group. The focus here is the celebration of the voice of the subject. The researcher had the opportunity to explore "practice validity," another new term coined to convey the ultimate test of any research—the usefulness of the theory to those who live the experience being explained. If the theory impacts upon the lives of those who live the condition or situation in question it might be said to have demonstrated practice validity. Of course this can only be tested after the theory

Figure 6. A Social Contract in Theory: A Contract for Increasing Influence and Validity

	Give	Get
Subject	Boundaries and frameworks for theory generalization Practice validity Face validity from the target group	Framework for understanding daily life Voice and recognition of issues of lifeworld
Researcher	Understanding the roles of theory Understanding of the topic Perspective of the literature and other subjects in the study	Practice validity Definition of contexts for generalization

has been disseminated. Each audience requires the researcher to adapt the social contract of theory making or disseminating.

The introduction of the social contract freed us to interact and explore ideas in an open partnership. Most subjects felt that they were part of the process; they were not being studied but had embarked upon a joint journey of discovery. The relationship was time limited and governed by the task at hand but dependent upon us as people, ready to risk and experiment. It seemed natural to see the relationship as a partnership that recognized the sophistication and willingness of subjects to be part of social science research. Partnership research provided an opportunity for role empowerment by making role expectations explicit within a process that authenticated the contribution of each of the parties. The improved clarity in the relationship increased the rigour of the research, opened new options for shared knowledge, and hopefully improved the quality of the research product.

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