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## References

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## **INTUITIVE INQUIRY: INTERPRETING OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE DATA**

Frequently my doctoral students protest that their research topics are chasing them, pursuing them. If only we were all so fortunate. When pursued, we only have to turn around to be known, encountered, or transformed by the encounter. In my own experience, both as a scientist and a contemplative, I am connected to what I know through the very core of my body, mind, and self. I think thoughts and create ideas through sharing with others, as though a collective field of reasoning and imagining is created. I see and feel knowledge viscerally, as though sculpting it with the force of my senses. I move, and the "sense-scape" of the movements informs my knowing, shaping and reshaping it in a field of kinesthetic perception. My thoughts connect to those of others: I work in collaboration even when I am working at home alone.

For the acclaimed geneticist Barbara McClintock, knowing a thing requires loving it. How could she love hybrid corn so? Yet she did. While examining a type of corn fungus with a microscope, she moved from looking at the chromosomes to becoming one with them:

I found that the more I worked with them the bigger and bigger [they] got, and when I was really working with them I wasn't outside, I was down there. I was part of the system. I was right down there with them, and everything got big. I even was able to see the internal parts of the chromosomes--actually, everything was there. It surprised me because I actually felt as if I were right down there and these were my friends. (qt. in Keller, 117)

Spiritual traditions, especially indigenous traditions, so often characterize a wise and encompassing intelligence with the qualities that Barbara McClintock describes so well. To know others, we must love them first and look at the world from their perspective. To know a phenomenon of experience or of nature, we must love it and become its friend. It is as though what is observed gently yields itself to our knowing. There is no object, no subject, and no intrusion.

By loving what we study, we approach it tenderly. Such a compassionate knowing brings a softness to the way we ask our questions, set our hypotheses, devise our instruments, conduct our investigations, analyze our data, construct our theories, and speak to our readers or audience. Our loving approach brings the nature of the phenomenon studied alive to our senses. Searching (or re-searching) from that inside view, its essential qualities animate to the researcher's own experience in both the objective and subjective senses. When they are cross-verified in both the mechanics of conventional objective science and in the more unconventional intuitive sense of the researcher, both objective and subjective knowing can contribute jointly to our understanding. In mirroring the complexity of human knowing in scientific inquiry, McClintock and others are forerunners of a more connected science in which observations and subjective knowings expand and hone one another over time.

### [Overview of Intuitive Inquiry](#)

In *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences: Honoring Human Experience* (Braud and Anderson 1998), I introduced intuitive inquiry as a general approach to studying transformative experiences (Anderson 1998). Many of the techniques and research strategies can be blended with other research methods. Both observational data and intuition are encouraged as sources of amplification and refinement of one another throughout the course of the research endeavor. For the purposes of intuitive inquiry, I define intuition to include the more commonplace forms of intuitive insight such as novel thoughts and ideas, together with insights derived from nonrational processes such as dream images, visions, kinesthetic impressions, a felt (or proprioceptive) sense, an inner sense or taste

accompanying contemplative practices and prayer, and spontaneous creative expressions in dance, sound, improvisation, writing, and visual art. Like observational data, intuitions oblige corroborative evidence since they are subject to error and bias. Although it can be argued that all experiences studied deeply and intensely have transformative elements, intuitive inquiry may be particularly suited to studying transformative experiences themselves.

In this more developed version, intuitive inquiry seeks to provide an approach to research that systematically incorporates both objective and subjective knowledge through a step-by-step interpretive process--cycles of interpretation that shape the ongoing inquiry. The traditional term for this interpretive approach is hermeneutics, a term derived from the Greek god of communication, Hermes, known for his eloquence, cunning, and trickery in interpreting the messages of the gods. As used in contemporary philosophy, hermeneutics imparts to the research endeavor a complex but very explicit theoretical framework. At the outset of the research endeavor, the intuitive researcher initially identifies her or his values and assumptions through active and connected engagement with the experience studied and then uses these values and assumptions as hermeneutical lenses to explore and analyze similar experiences in others. This is called the hermeneutical circle. Rather than bracketing the researcher's values and assumptions (as in established phenomenological approaches to research), the intuitive researcher employs her or his values and assumptions as lenses to begin the interpretative cycles of analyses. Identifying and articulating those interpretive lenses is an important aspect of the forward arc of the hermeneutical circle and requires an exacting self-inquiry into the researcher's experience and an understanding of the phenomenon studied. In what is known as the return arc of the hermeneutical circle, the researcher's initial hermeneutical lenses are modified, expanded, and honed through successive comparisons with the relayed experiences of others. Specific themes and interpretations develop through modification, amplification, and discrimination. An empirical application of the traditional hermeneutical circle has been advanced by Martin J. Packer and Richard B. Addison.

From the interpretative stance, the researcher's point of view and the evaluation of explanatory accounts [of others] are not seen as being separated in this way, but as in a constant dialogue. Rather than opposite ends of a straight line, they are on the circumference of a circle: the hermeneutical circle. Establishing a point of view, a perspective, is the forward arc, and evaluation forms the reverse arc .... But the circularity is not... a "vicious" one where we simply confirm our prejudices .... If we are persevering and open, our attention will be drawn to the projective character of our understanding and (in the backward arc, the movement of return) we gain an increased appreciation of what the fore-structure involves, and where it might best be changed. (Packer and Addison 1989, 33-34)

In the best of circumstances, the hermeneutical process avers the transformative nature of engaging with an experience, which claims and compels the researcher to know and appreciate the experience studied in increasingly subtle and yet expanded ways as the inquiry continues. Often the researcher is transformed by this iterative hermeneutical endeavor; it can feel like an act of deep remembrance.

Intuitive inquiry was first inspired by the challenges of conducting research in the field of transpersonal psychology. In exploring "farther reaches of human nature," transpersonal psychology seeks to delve deeply into some of the most inexplicable aspects of human experiences, including mystical and unitive experiences, experiences of transformation, extraordinary insight, meditative awareness, altered states of consciousness, and self-actualization. Although transpersonal psychologists and trans-personalists (a term more indicative of the field's interdisciplinary nature) have been studying those rich dimensions of being human for roughly thirty years, research in the field has often seemed stymied by a reliance on the experimental methods it inherited from the dominant psychologies of the 1960s and 1970s, the context from which it emerged. Like other methods, especially qualitative and blended qualitative and quantitative methods proposed in recent years, and especially those introduced and surveyed in Braud and Anderson (1998), intuitive inquiry encourages a more inclusive and connected manner of conceptualizing research topics, collecting and analyzing data, and presenting research findings in the study of human experience.

### [The Principle of Resonance Sympathetic Resonance: Reconceptualizing and Re-enchanting Validity](#)

From the point of view of everyday consensual discourse, validity concerns our capacity to relate accurately the fullness and richness of a given human experience. To portray something accurately is to relay it thoroughly and comprehensively. Validity in conventional psychological empiricism, typically reduced to tests and measurements,

often obscures a common sense validity of just telling the whole truth of what occurred in lived experience. Marshaled into operational definitions comprising Likert scaling, Q-sorts, and so on, descriptions of love, joy, pain, and betrayal again seem narrowed and muddled. Thwarted by reductionism, the study of the more subtle dimensions of human experiences often elude our best research endeavors.

Essential to that process is to bring a compassionate heart to scientific inquiry. Compassion allows us to ask the most meaningful questions and guides our hypotheses and speculations toward rich and expansive theories regarding the nature of the human experience. Compassionate listening invites our research participants to speak to us freely and honestly about the depth and value of their experiences. It takes skill to analyze data; yet, compassion allows us to see the full value and meaningfulness of the data as it shapes itself before us. And, finally, as we write up our findings, compassionate writing is heartfelt, a vessel for others to hear ideas and theories already formed of compassionate listening, analysis, and the synthesis of findings. Compassionately informed research is qualitatively different from emotionally detached research. Our values and intentions intimately shape our concepts and analysis daily, as people, as scientists. Valuing rigor, precision, and clarity does not exempt us from providing descriptions of human experiences that claim the full domain of being human, including experiences generally thought of as spiritual and mystical. Those descriptions do not assume that the researcher is looking for an objective world "out there" in the positivistic sense but give us hope and an expanded awareness of human life lived fully and richly (and perhaps a more elegant consensus of its measure).

Examples abound. My students' and colleagues' research topics--such as reclaiming identity after abuse, the inward movement of beauty, the qualities of serenity and contentment in everyday life, the experience of addiction and its impact on long-term relationships, betrayal by a spiritual teacher, mutuality in relationship, and the experience of long-term chronic pain--have all emerged from personal experience and a desire to share and amplify the experience by studying the experiences of others. My own research on sacred weeping (Anderson 1996) was born of a personal experience and desire to give voice to a life experience unexplored by contemporary science or by investigations into the nature of the mystical experience. I searched for relevant descriptions that resonated with my own experiences. Reading the descriptions again and again over time allowed me to lean gently into the experiences of others to seek a deeper and more subtle understanding. The process was essentially introspective, reflective, and demanding in terms of documentation and many cycles of reviewing the data and generalizing to themes again and again. I doubt that I would have been able to see, far less understand and appreciate, the experience in others if I had not had the experience myself.

The principle of sympathetic resonance in the scientific endeavor is best introduced with an analogy. If one plucks a string on a cello on one side of a room, a string of a cello on the opposite side will begin to vibrate, too. Striking a tuning fork will vibrate another tuning fork some distance away. The resonance communicates and connects directly and immediately without intermediaries (except for the conduits of air and space). The principle of sympathetic resonance introduces resonance as a validation procedure for the researcher's particular intuitive insights and syntheses. The principle suggests that research can function more like poetry in its capacity for the immediate apprehension and recognition of an experience spoken by another and yet (surprisingly and refreshingly, perhaps) be true for oneself, as well. Research methods may begin to approach the borders of understanding and communication, which seem more like poetry than like conventional empirical science as we have known it in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Describing the richness and fullness of human experience may require the use of metaphors, similes, and symbols. The poetry of Jelaluddin Rumi, Emily Dickinson, and Rainer Maria Rilke speaks directly to the inmost Self. Writing about the poetry of Rilke, Robert Hass, an American poet laureate, describes the poet's unique ability to "whisper or croon into our inmost ear":

Rilke's special gift as a poet is that he does not seem to speak from the middle of life, that he is always calling us away from it. His poems have the feeling of being written from a great depth in himself. What makes them so seductive is that they also speak to the reader so intimately. They seem whispered or crooned into our inmost ear, insinuating us toward the same depth in ourselves .... It is also what makes him difficult to read thoughtfully. He induces a kind of trance, as soon as the whispering begins ....

Look how he bores into us. That caressing voice seems to be speaking to the solitary walker in each of us who is moved by springtime, stars, oceans, the sound of music .... It is as if he were peeling off layers of the apparent richness of the self, arguing us back to the poverty of a great raw, objectless longing. (Mitchell 1989, xiv-xv)

So often the poetry of Rumi, Dickinson, and Rilke points us in the direction of immediate knowing. Meaning somehow passes directly from the writer to the reader or listener, seemingly by pointing to an inchoate experience already shared by both of us. On reading a poem we may recognize our own experience (or a very similar one) expressed within it. That recognition is an immediate kind of sympathetic resonance. Analogously for the intuitive researcher, research findings may present a pattern of descriptions rather like a pattern of acoustical harmonics. Although the reader or listener may not have the exact arrangement of harmonics, the basic pattern is nonetheless immediately apprehended and recognized as being like one's own.

In terms of scientific validation, the immediate apprehension or recognition of a researcher's insight analyses could be verified using conventional experimental, quantitative procedures. The validity of findings is thus formed through consensus building that notes consonance, dissonance, or neutrality by participants representing different cultures or subgroups. Subgroup by subgroup, a kind of mapping of the validity of a research finding is created. A modified sociogram, constructed with concentric circles of resonance, designates subgroups wherein the research findings are immediately apprehended and recognized or reacted to with dissonance or neutrality. In a recent study by Caryl Gopfert (1999) on betrayal by a spiritual teacher within the Zen Buddhist tradition, participants responded independently to each others' stories by commenting on the unique or resonating features of the betrayal of the other participants. Furthermore, an independent group of teachers and students within the Zen Buddhism tradition who had not experienced betrayal by a spiritual teacher also responded to the participants' stories, commenting on the unique and resonating features of betrayal from within their own experience. Her results then allowed for clarity in portraying the resonant features of betrayal by a spiritual teacher across two independently selected groups. That kind of mapping is vital to understanding the experiences of the diverse communities in which we live, as has been recounted by innumerable feminist, ethnic, and cultural researchers.

#### [Resonance in Research Design: Following the Ontogeny of the Researcher's Experience](#)

Especially in the study of complex human phenomena, the most robust research methods follow the ontogeny of the researcher's own experience of the phenomenon studied. Ontogeny, derived from the Greek word *einai* meaning "to be," and *genes* meaning "born," signifies a course of development. The researcher positions the inquiry from within her or his unique and personal experience. The hermeneutical perspective, from which intuitive inquiry originates, assumes that we are continually influencing our environments anyway and therefore interpreting our experiences regardless of how objective we may appear to be. Rather than discarding and bracketing our experiences as researchers, intuitive inquiry consciously and adroitly positions the researcher and his or her experience at the core of the research endeavor. Other research strategies are less honest, however well intended. We are a part of the whole of what is known. We cannot extricate ourselves from the interpretive dynamic of being human. We cannot honestly escape our attitudes and projections. How would we ever even identify our success? All we can do as researchers is to bring some measure of consciousness to our interpretive stance and rigor to the procedures that minimize the chances of circling around our own projections. Much of what passes for objective research, especially in the social sciences, is little more than fast tap-dancing around the researcher's originating ideology.

In contrast, intuitive inquiry openly invites the researcher to structure the research method, procedures, setting, and context to maximize (rather than minimize) the very gateway through which the researcher understands or is inspired by the experience studied. As in heuristic research (Moustakas 1990), having had the experience studied (or one akin to it) gives the researcher a unique and precious perspective. The researcher's intrigue and inspiration matter too in lending the research endeavor a special verve and standpoint. By employing those experiences, motivations, and inspirations, the intuitive researcher rallies a vantage point uniquely her or his own. Like a specially designed telescope, the lenses of the researcher's experiences, motivations, and inspirations permit the intuitive researcher to see more subtly into the phenomenon being studied and to related to it in a deeply connected way. At least some particulars undress universal phenomena, allowing the intuitive researcher to see with the eyes of Eros.

Much of what I am saying here is directly related to what is understood in the field of social psychology as the social psychology of the psychological experiment, ultimately the means of setting up an exemplary experiment. Creating research designs that closely reenact, simulate, or generate the experience being studied is not new to psychological inquiry. Context and setting matter. Good research designs set the stage for the phenomena being studied to show up, even in the laboratory. Well-known procedures including re-enactment, role-playing, psychodrama, and

simulation, as well as newer procedures including creative and re-enactment interviewing, storytelling, and narrative procedures, are artful possibilities.

Following the ontology of the researcher's experience of the phenomenon studied, however, requires unique personal insight into one's own relationship to the phenomenon studied. The research of Becky Coleman (1999) on obesity and right-body size for women provides a salient example. Because the most integrative experiences of transforming her own experience of obesity and right-body size had occurred in groups of women in intimate dialogue, Coleman chose to study obese women meeting in small groups. Dialoguing with one another over time, Coleman took the women on retreat during the final phase of her data collection. She was able to professionally photograph and videotape their exchanges and interactions to the fullest possible extent. There are many other ways to study that phenomenon that would have been less costly and time-consuming. However, Coleman's own experience and understanding of the intimate demands and integrity of understanding obesity committed her to a research strategy that focused on groups of women sharing their stories about obesity and right-body size.

The research of Brian Heery (1999) on peak physical experiences in the practice of Aikido follows the course of his own experiences in gymnastics and Aikido in what is commonly known as "being in the zone." Like other researchers, he could have interviewed randomly selected athletes and Aikidoists and illuminated the prevalence of peak physical experiences. He could have selected exemplar athletes and identified the prevailing features of their peak experiences. Yet, his own experience, especially as an Aikidoist, led him to believe that studying the phenomenon profoundly required at least two things: direct physical interaction with an Aikido master who regularly exhibits peak experiences and his own continuing training and development in the energy awareness practices of Aikido and Tai Chi. A laptop computer in hand, Heery left for Japan.

In both examples, Coleman and Heery custom-designed their research strategies by employing their own experiences with the phenomenon under investigation to set the context and procedures for data gathering. Such research strategies are much more challenging than they would be if they imitated the strategies developed by others, however efficacious those strategies may be. Custom-made research strategies follow a congruent course set in motion by the researcher's unique and personal experience.

### [Resonance in Communicating Results: Writing from a Personal and Embodied Perspective](#)

To communicate powerfully and resonately, intuitive inquiry invites research participants to speak from their own unique and personal perspectives born of their own experience. Accordingly, in communicating results, researchers are urged to quote, often extensively, the actual words of participants to retain and portray the fullness of the participants' unique voices and phenomenon studied.

As playwright Tennessee Williams put it: "If I try to make a universal character, it becomes boring. It doesn't exist. If I make the character specific and concrete, it becomes universal." Unique expressions of experiences allow us to see, hear, understand, and value another's expression more clearly even if it is not very familiar to us. For an instant, we arrive together at the same threshold--a threshold of appreciating, knowing, and acknowledging an aspect of life we all may share. Recognized more easily by others as familiar or resonant with their own experience than abstractions and summaries, that unique and personal voice (often a passionate voice) may transport us beyond our imposed sense of separateness.

Another powerful way to convey the resonance of experience is to speak and write from the sense-scape of the body. This embodied perspective in writing about transformation is described and extensively illustrated by contributing authors in an upcoming work of mine entitled *The Body's Voice: A Collection of Writings on Transformation* (in progress). Such a perspective gives voice to the physical, sensuous, and visceral wisdom of our bodies that so often takes a back seat to our thinking minds. In intuitive inquiry, participants are asked to detail physical descriptions of experience, and researchers are asked to contextualize and communicate findings by writing in an embodied manner themselves. Although writing from the perspective of the physical body may initially seem unfamiliar and perplexing, it ultimately invites a deepening presence and appreciation, an awakening to living more fully in our bodies in the world. When research findings are communicated close to the bone of the experiences themselves, readers are able to connect to the felt experience of the tellers and to resonate with the stories from within their own

bodies. Descriptions with sensory and lyric detail can produce resonance in readers, especially when the experiences detailed are close (or harmonic with) their own. If in relaying experiences the participants' bodies come alive to the experiences described, the resulting utterances will be rich and full. If in relaying research findings, the researcher's body comes alive while writing, it is likely that the researcher is writing from an embodied perspective (and not from the head alone) (and readers (or the audience) may discover that same resonance within themselves.

Although this brief discussion is limited to expressing findings through writing, words themselves may not be sufficient, especially in describing subtle experiences. Researchers are encouraged to use creative media such as pictures, photographs, recordings, drawings, videos, poetry, etc., to resonantly portray the phenomenon studied. It is the researcher's final responsibility to portray the experience as fully and resonantly as possible, without diminishing it in the telling.

### [The Hermeneutical Circle: Spiraling through Key Texts](#)

Intuitive inquiry invites researchers, participants, and eventually readers to enter successive cycles of interpretation. Intuitive inquiry requires at least three iterative cycles (or spirals) of interpretation, the simplest version of the method approximating a full hermeneutical analysis. The first two cycles are contained within the forward arc of the hermeneutical circle, and all cycles that follow are contained within the return arc of the hermeneutical circle. The actual number of cycles in the return arc will vary according to a host of factors, too numerous to name, but will include available time, complexity of topic, depth of analysis, and number of resonance panels. Each cycle around the research question changes, refines, and amplifies the researcher's interpretation of the experience studied. Attention to recording both objective and subjective data accompanies each iterative cycle.

### [The Forward Arc: Entering the Circle](#)

#### The Claim of the "Text": First Cycle

In conventional research, a researcher typically chooses a research topic depending on current scholarly interests, the direction of the inquiry in her or his specialty areas, and personal interest. In intuitive inquiry, rather than choosing a focused topic in the conventional way, a researcher begins by selecting a text that repeatedly attracts or claims her or his attention and relates to his or her area of interest in a general or nonspecific way. In a beautiful and insightful passage articulating his understanding of the meaning of text in the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Gerald L. Bruns writes

that the understanding of text always requires, in some sense, a conversion to the text's way of thinking, and what this means is that we always end up having to reinterpret ourselves, and even change ourselves, in the light of the text. To understand a text is not only to grasp its meaning; it is to understand the claim that it has on us. Most often this claim is critical in the strong sense, as when a text exposes us to our prejudices, by which Gadamer means not only our private, subjective dispositions but, more important, the conceptual frameworks we inhabit and to which we appeal when we try to make sense of things. More is at stake in interpretation than interpretation. What would it be for a text to explode the conceptual world of the one who seeks to interpret it? (Bruns 1992, 813)

The researcher then enters the circle of interpretation by engaging with the "text" daily and recording both objective and subjective impressions. Researchers spend at least thirty minutes per day (or approximately one hour every other day) reading, listening to, or viewing the text. Thoughts, ideas, daydreams, conversations, impressions, visions, and intuitions occurring during sessions (and at other pertinent times) are recorded in a noninvasive manner, to least disrupt the stream of consciousness typically accompanying intuitive insight. Notebooks or hand-held tape recorders are ideal. After Arnold Mindell's (1982) observation that intuitions (or "channels" in his language) manifest as visual (inclusive of dream imagery and visual imagination), auditory (inclusive of most thoughts), proprioceptive (a felt sense), or kinesthetic (involving internal or external movements or shifts), the following grid may be helpful for recording intuitive impressions in this phase and subsequent interpretative cycles.

Even choosing the text most compelling to the researcher may itself be challenging. What draws the attention of the researcher may not initially look like a research topic. Complicating matters, a hermeneutical text may be a wide

range of recorded experiences and not just text in the usual sense of words on a page. Is the text a special set of photographs? a painting? a screenplay? a Madonna video? a song? a ballet? a sacred text? an interview transcript? a flash image or formula that appears like a solution to a problem? records of transformative experiences? For example, at the outset of her research on the somatic experience of presence, Cortney Phelon (1998) listened to a particular piece of contemporary music that drew the "full orchestra" of her body's response. From that she was able to begin creating a body-based perspective, based on the true "dynamic ground" of her own body, on which to conceptualize her research (4-5). Mary Perdue (1999) was drawn to three pictures at an early phase of her research on the transformative aspects of nontraditional gender identification. The first portrayed a muscled, bearded, tattooed man without a penis or breasts, which had compelled her for some time. "Like the mermaid and the centaur, he was a mixed, mythical creature, embodying both genders and neither; embodying the transcendence of gender polarity." The second picture portrayed a "butch lesbian taking off her shirt" and the third, a double exposure, a woman in "both butch and fem drag." By engaging with those texts for several weeks, she was better able to acknowledge that her "love for butch lesbians... is that they walk through life marked by their differentness" (2-3) and how their presence challenged the binary system of gender and signaled transformation of individual and social consciousness.

Typically, employing texts produced by others allows for more encounter and surprise and allows the hermeneutical circle to widen even at the outset. Nonetheless, entering the circle of interpretation through the gateway of the researcher's recorded dreams, journal entries, drawings, or sculpture may be possible from time to time, as in the case of Heuristic Research (Moustakas 1990), which uses the researcher's unique personal experience as the impetus and focal point of what might otherwise be called a hermeneutical process.

By repeatedly engaging with a potential text in a process of observation, inward reflection, dialogue, and perhaps meditation, impressions and insights converge into a focused research topic. A suitable topic for intuitive inquiry has the following attributes:

1. Compelling. For a research topic to sustain the researcher's interest and energy, it should inspire the motivations and intellectual passions of the researcher.
2. Manageable. If the researcher is a dissertation student, the topic should be "do-able" in one year. If a researcher has limited time, manageability means that the research inquiry can be completed within the time allotted, including periods of rest and relaxation.
3. Clear. Good research topics can be expressed easily in one sentence. The more a researcher understands a research topic, the simpler the basic statement of intent becomes.
4. Focused. A simple and focused topic with significant implications for human experience is preferable to large, ambiguously defined topics.
5. Concrete. The research topic should be directly related to specific behaviors, experiences, or phenomena.
6. Researchable. Some topics are too grand or do not (yet) lend themselves to scientific inquiry.
7. Promising. A topic is promising when it signifies an experience of something still unknown (or seeking understanding). While an inquiry is just beginning, only the individual researcher can evaluate the potential and importance of a topic.

### Developing the Interpretive Lenses: Second Cycle

Having engaged with a specific text to focus the research question or topic, the intuitive researcher then re-engages the research topic through a different text (or set of texts) to identify the structure and accompanying values the researcher brings to the topic. The researcher's initial structure and accompanying values become the preliminary lenses of interpretation, requisite for engaging with the texts of others and interpreting their understanding of the topic. Those preliminary lenses will invariably be changed, refined, and amplified as the researcher moves through the iterative cycle(s) of interpretation. The researcher must be extremely clear about her or his preliminary lenses, so that all conscious and unconscious preconceptions are brought to light.

The initial phase of developing the interpretative lenses is usually easy and fast, more analogous to brainstorming. A list of possible lenses is generated. Then the researcher engages with the selected text(s) on a daily basis so as to keep the topic elevated in awareness and begins to note consistent patterns or clusters of ideas in her or his

understanding of the topic. Through a sometimes arduous process of combining, reorganizing, and identifying emerging patterns, the list shortens to just several clusters. In a study examining obesity and right-body size for women, Coleman's (1999) initial brainstorming for potential lenses resulted in forty possible lenses, including balance, knowing, power, beauty, space, motivation, expression, creativity, meaning making, human, healing, and individuality. The final list included six clusters: motivation, knowing, power, individuality, space (or spaciousness), and meaning or myth making. In my study on sacred weeping (which, to date, only reports on what I now understand as the first and second cycles), the initial list included forty-two possible lenses and boiled down to nine psycho-spiritual characteristics: relinquishing of superficial concerns, reintegration of self, "touching reality," holding disparate polarities of existence, seeing the tragic as universal, changes in bodily awareness, changes in visual perception, an expansion of awareness, and an inward sense of freedom or vastness. In a study of Emily Dickinson's creative process, Kelly S. Lynch (1999) investigated Dickinson's life, poetry, and historical context. Her concluding hermeneutical lenses included reading and engaging with the text through the lenses of the body, relationship, and creative artistic engagement.

### [The Return Arc: Engaging the Text of Others](#)

#### Engaging the Claims of Others: Third Cycle

In this phase, the researcher collects original textual data bearing on the topic. Typically, the data take the form of interviews from participants who meet specific criteria (or alternate texts that meet specific criteria). First, the researcher identifies the target population (or target texts) and creates procedures for recruiting a sample of participants (or texts) from that defined population (or textural material or corpus). Second, the researcher defines selection criteria that will retain participants who (or texts which) will speak directly and articulately to the research topic and that will reject participants who (or texts which) will detract from a clear understanding of the topic. Third, utilizing the hermeneutical lenses developed above, the researcher analyzes the new texts as a means for modifying, redefining, reorganizing, and expanding his or her understanding of the research topic. That final step (or penultimate step if a resonance panel is further employed) allows the circle of understanding to expand beyond the researcher's projections (in the positive sense) by spiraling in the experiences of others.

Two examples will help to illuminate the process. Cortney Phelon (1999) investigated the presence of the therapist in psychotherapy by first recruiting professional writers and therapists who recommended texts bearing on the topic of therapeutic presence. From those recommended writings, Phelon selected texts that uniquely addressed the topic of therapeutic presence according to set criteria, analyzed the selected texts via the hermeneutical lenses created specifically for interpreting therapeutic presence, and distilled a set of common themes. She then recruited a resonance panel of advanced therapists who "recognized the presence of the therapist as a significant factor in personal healing" (26) and invited them to modify and refine the common themes she had distilled from the texts. In a study of spontaneous grief in response to separation (and reconnection) with nature, Jay Dufrechou (1999) developed a set of hermeneutical lenses by engaging his own experience and the phenomenological discourse of philosophers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, David Levin, and David Abram. According to predetermined criteria, he created and analyzed two sets of texts for his hermeneutical analysis: a corpus of texts derived from published writers on nature and a corpus of texts written by selected participants committed to writing in depth about their experience of grief in response to feeling separated from (and reconnected with) nature.

Throughout any qualitative data analysis, and most importantly for intuitive inquiry, the most important feature of synthesizing data is the intuitive breakthroughs, those illuminating moments when the data begin to reveal and shape themselves before you. Patterns seem to shape and reveal themselves with each fresh set of information. I usually work with a paper and pencil, drawing small and large circles--representing themes or stray ideas--and shifting the patterns and modifying the relationships and size of the circles, rather like a mobile Venn diagram. I know other researchers who work more verbally--bringing together ideas in lists of interrelated themes, narratives, sequences, or irreducible features of the experience studied. That interpretative process may go on for several days or weeks with rest or incubation periods between work sessions.

### [Specific Research Skills for the Intuitive Researcher Reflective Listening](#)



The researcher listens reflectively to her or his own experience and the experience of others. As a consequence, the researcher's understanding tends to expand naturally to incorporate both novel and integrative features of the experience studied. As a research strategy, the researcher's own capacity for reflective listening to self also allows her or him to model that capacity and facilitate a similar process in research participants. At a theoretical level, the researcher's capacity for reflective listening initiates a field of sympathetic resonance that facilitates each participant's capacity to listen to the depths of their own experience.

### Indwelling

Indwelling is a term borrowed from heuristic research and is artfully described by Clark Moustakas:

Indwelling . . . involves a willingness to gaze with unwavering attention and concentration into some facet of human experience in order to understand its constituent qualities and its wholeness. To understand something fully, one dwells inside the [visible and obvious] and [invisible and essential] factors to draw from them every possible nuance, texture, fact, and meaning. The indwelling process is conscious and deliberate, yet it is not lineal or logical. It follows clues wherever they appear; one dwells inside them and expands their meanings and associations until a fundamental insight is achieved. (Moustakas 1990, 24)

Indwelling on a particular facet of human experience often becomes a preoccupying feature of the researcher's daily activities. Everything may become raw material for scrutiny: relationships, dreams, bumper stickers, newspaper articles, chance encounters, casual conversations, and synchronistic events such as unexpected phone calls or visits. In my own research, especially on the work of the nature of symbols, I sometimes feel as though I'm continually scanning my life experience--books, billboards, newspapers, and word images--to nuance, amplify, and lay waste my understanding. Some of the most productive encounters are the most confusing and bewildering. Compelling and arresting images may become gateways for greater understanding. Such a research encounter is expanded in the concept of Trickstering.

### Trickstering

In indigenous cultures worldwide, tricksters open gateways of awareness and insights. Tricksters are playful, mischievous, and sometimes outrageous. Particular to culture, coyotes, ravens, fairies, leprechauns, and pookas (a very Irish goblin) endow humans with insight, usually in the context of making us feel foolish. Coyotes play tricks. Ravens steal and turn the stolen goods into something else. Fairies appear as lovers. Leprechauns give us gold that disappears. Pookas gleefully take us for a riotous ride. They produce auspicious bewilderment!

In research, especially transpersonal research, auspicious bewilderment may signal the beginning of renewed understanding. Contradictory stories and examples move us deeper into the intricacies of the topic of inquiry. Nuances that do not fit generate reconceptualization. Confusion takes us in an unanticipated direction. Paradox challenges our assumptions and so on. The research project will take longer, require more work, and probably cost more money, and it will also be more complete and useful in the end. Weeks, even months, of feeling auspiciously bewildered--which, by the way, is very different from depression--is not unusual for an intuitive researcher. While bewildered, keep records and stay with the process as it is. It is usually worthwhile even to exaggerate, dramatize, or extend the features of what bewilders, so as to see deeper. Dreamwork, drawing, dance, authentic movement, storytelling, and other expressions of the imagination may bring the creative, nonrational aspects of experience into synthesized awareness. If it gets to be too much, rest, sleep, take a break, or gently put the research project (or that aspect of the project) on the "back burner" for a while, not allowing it to dominate your activities; return to the project again when refreshed. The very nature of intuitive methods sets the methodological stage for new ideas to emerge. They often do.

More dangerous to intuitive inquiry is thinking that we know what we're doing, being really confident that we're on top of it, or having fixed ideas about the findings before we've finished collecting and analyzing the full complement of data. Transformative experiences often require periods of confusion for us to more fully understand them. If we go for a long time without being surprised, we should beware. Something might be wrong. Is the topic so well understood that there's nothing new to say? What's happening to contradictory information? Is the researcher bored?

exhausted? otherwise preoccupied? on a tangent? in denial? avoiding the inevitable move to the heart of the topic? If so, being human is percolating its way into the researcher's research experience. Don't panic. Rest. Come back when you are feeling refreshed and unwilling to spend energy going in the wrong direction.

### Varying Magnification

One of the most difficult features of skillful research for a beginning researcher to grasp is the degree of detail necessary for a particular investigation. How much detail--or degree of magnification--best supports the topic of inquiry? When should the researcher vary magnification? My initial understanding of the imperative of varying detail stems from work in cytology. In using microscopes in a laboratory, the utility of changing magnification in order to view various genetic structures more distinctly was immediately obvious. As a young scientist, rotating the lens of magnification on my slide preparation from 10x (10 times the ordinary magnification) to 30x to 100x--and then to switching to an electron microscope--was an intellectual revolution! Still, nearly thirty years later, it brings tears to my eyes. I was then and am now thrilled by the magnificence, complexity, and integrity of what revealed itself to my eyes. One lens reveals the cellular level of activity, another the chromosomal, another the molecular, and so on.

Analogously, the level or degree of detail is important in studying human experience, though less obviously so. Varying magnification makes a tremendous difference. Principles of organizations may change with different levels of analysis. In my own research, and in working with beginning researchers, it is troubling and especially perplexing to articulate and teach how to find the best range of detail to suit a particular study. It may be best to learn the skills for determining the appropriate degree of detail to study a particular phenomenon, the closeness of discriminations necessary, and when to vary them, through trial and error, as I did.

In a transpersonal approach to research, determining and varying magnification are even more difficult and less obvious. Transpersonal phenomena seem to yield subtle layers and more depth. Yet, an overly detailed analysis can lose sight of the bigger picture. In my own research on symbology, for example, not only did I access a range of sources, including archaeology, mythology, and legendary material, but I often shifted the bigger picture to the smallest features to delve deeply into a micro perspective of a symbol. Such thorough immersion in minutiae was sometimes a dead end, but more often it unlocked doors to a more comprehensive understanding of the larger picture. I learned about the symbol and more because glimpsing how the ancient people used and understood a particular symbol helped me to understand how they imagined their world more generally. That movement to follow a trail of detail, rather like a detective novel, was my own intuitive knowing of when to change magnification, when to close in, and when to broaden out again into a larger understanding. Much of what I appreciate now about those ancient cultures I learned by way of these intuitive forays into particularity, rather like moving from 30x magnification to the electron microscope and back out again.

### Incubating the Data

Incubation invites the creative process to do its work while the researcher rests, relaxes, and otherwise removes her or his focus from the research inquiry. The researcher "retreats from the intense, concentrated focus on the question" (Moustakas 1990, 28). Rest and relaxation with lots of open time to muse and do nothing are essential for the intuitive process to unfold naturally and spontaneously. Because it is easy to minimize the importance of rest and relaxation, it may even be necessary to schedule it. Empty space and time allow nonlinear, right-brain activity to function more openly and creatively. Rather like suddenly remembering a childhood friend's name when you have given up thinking about it, unexpected insights occur spontaneously, and during activities unrelated to research, including while bathing, waking in the morning, dreaming, jogging, idling time away, meditating, and the like.

In my own experience, incubation can occur at many points in the research endeavor. It is particularly unhelpful to the intuitive process, though, to proceed directly to data analysis without an incubation "down-time" for the new information to settle and shift in the awareness of the researcher. The researcher may even wish to return to periods of incubation throughout the period of data analysis as well, especially if the analysis is lengthy or if the researcher feels stymied or thwarted.

## The Importance of Audience

Most researchers, if they are honest, have an audience or readership in mind that they want to reach and influence. I encourage my students to imagine their anticipated audience well beyond me or any other research supervisor. What do they look like? What kinds of questions are they asking? What do they want? What is the researcher saying to them and why? What are they doing with the research findings? The kind of imaginal process facilitates identifying an anticipated audience and helps intuitive researchers to focus a research question, from the outset, ask congruent questions and stay on track. It lends a conversational tone to the presentation of results (if desired), and helps the writing stay clear and connected. The writing style will be more heartfelt and embodied as well because the researchers are writing to those they know or have come to know intimately in their imaginations. Most important, research findings are more likely to be expressed in a personal and embodied manner, inviting readers to resonate to the full sense-scape of the experiences portrayed.

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