❦ FOUR ❦

STRATEGIES FOR DESIGN

Putting Crystallization Into Practice

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*More important than attempting to include everything—or as much
as possible—is to have a well-thought-out pluralism and a balanced
multiplicity in the perspectives that the empirical landings offer.*

—Alvesson and Sköldberg
(2000, p. 188)

Crystallization does provide a tempting openness to casting a wide net
when composing a text, but that does not mean that more is necessarily
better. As in the quote above, authors should aim for pluralism and balance,
not simply for a laundry list of different representational forms. The trick, of
course, remains finding and maintaining that balance between richness and
diversity of perspective on one hand, and coherence, aesthetic appeal, and clarity
on the other. At the same time, all authors confront limitations on their skills
in any given genre.

No formula for crystallized design exists. Instead, opportunities and con-
straints abound, and researchers should expect, even embrace, an organic evo-
lution of their projects. Janesick (2000) encourages us to think of qualitative
research as being both like a precise, orderly, scripted minuet *and* like a free-
flowing, responsive, creative improvisational dance. Training and careful plan-
ning prepare you to enter the field, but equally vital is embracing opportunities

as they arise and adapting to the needs of the people and context in which you work (see Janesick, 2003). You have no need at any given point in your project to decide "once and for all" what methods of collection, analysis, and representation you will use; plans should remains always open to revision and amendment. Nonetheless, you may find it helpful to map out preliminary goals and ideas about analyses and genres to provide a working vision of a project.

This chapter leads readers through the initial design processes of a project utilizing crystallization. I begin by outlining a reflection process, suggesting questions to guide you in exploring a myriad of considerations about the best fit among your goals and audience(s), as well as your personal strengths and weaknesses. I then offer several guidelines for weighing your options for analysis and representations. I discuss the role of theory in different types of qualitative research and suggest ways of managing its inclusion in various forms of representation. Finally, I advise determining a thesis statement or statement of purpose for your crystallized project, mapping the project, and then looking to the future. Of course, none of the steps outlined here are fixed in a linear progression; I invite you to think of crystallization as an iterative process and to forge your own creative paths.

WONDERING

Regardless of how improvisational a research project turns out to be in data collection and analysis, all good research begins with preparation (Janesick, 2000). We must have training and planning, even if we then set aside the plan once in the field.

> The aha, the path to illumination, does not just happen. The creative leap is at best a wish, more likely an illusion. The creative person does not leap to illumination. Extensive preparation is required to lay the groundwork for one to be creative. (Hunter et al., 2002, p. 396)

Crystallization likewise requires preparation in order to set the stage for whatever opportunities may arise. In addition to reading relevant methodological, theoretical, and topic-specific materials, I also suggest that researchers explore their goals in a process I call *wondering.*

To prepare, explore the answers you generate to the following questions in deciding how to engage in crystallization for your project. I heartily encourage journaling or free writing on these topics, using writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2000b). Questions to ask yourself about your project goals,

intended audiences, own abilities and interests, and data should address your data collection and ongoing analysis, topics of investigation, preferred audiences, your own preferences and desires, and the genres through which you could express your ideas.

Data/Analysis

- What cases, events, stories, or details come to mind immediately when I think about my data?

- What have I learned about my data by immersing myself in it?

- What contradictions, inconsistencies, or exceptions to the rules do I notice in my data?

- How does my identity relate to my work? How do my age, gender, race/ethnicity, nationality, abilities and disabilities, special talents, formative experiences, and so on shape how I understand my data?

- How do I think my participants perceive me?

- What have my participants taught me about their worlds? About mine?

- How is power revealed and concealed in my data?

- How am I complicit with systems of power in my data and analyses?

- What truths seem to be missing from the preliminary analyses and accounts I have worked on?

Topics

- What are the key content claims I want to make about my topic?

- What patterns do I wish to explore?

- What is/are my thesis statement(s) for this project?

- What political implications of my project do I want to explore?

- What pragmatic suggestions for improving the world have I developed? Or in what areas do I detect a need for improvement that I might be able to shed light on with my study?

- What questions do I still have about my setting, participants, and processes?

Audiences

- What academic audiences do I want to reach with my work?

- What community, lay, or popular audiences could benefit from my findings?

- What would my favorite auntie [insert friend/relative of your choice] want to know about this topic?

- What nonprofit or government agencies could benefit from my project?

- What policies could be improved using ideas from my project?

- Sharing with which audiences would bring me the most satisfaction? Why?

Researcher Desire

- What is my favorite thing about my data? What makes me smile when I think of it? What makes me cry? What makes me angry?

- What would be fun to write?

- What process issues or ideas come up in my journaling that intrigue me?

- What strong emotions do I have about my participants, their stories, and our relationships?

- Whose research do I admire? Why?

- What about my study embarrasses me or makes me feel self-conscious? Why?

- What am I most proud of in my data?

- If one of my mentors asked me about my project, what would I want to tell her/him?

Genres

- What new forms would I like to experiment with?

- What types of writing am I good at?

- What nonwritten forms could I collect or represent my data in?

- What genres do I enjoy reading? Why?

- With what genres are my participants most familiar and comfortable?

- What texts could I produce that would benefit my participants?

- How do accounts I have written or produced (e.g., fieldnotes, transcripts, photographs, e-mails, memos) shape each other?

Using these questions, explore the project you see (or hope to see) taking shape. Stream-of-consciousness writing about an issue may help to get your mind rolling. You can also talk these issues out with a supportive friend or colleague; for example, my friend and colleague Leigh Berger Serrie and I had weekly "chai chats" at a café where we took turns processing out loud with each other issues that we were facing in the development of our book manuscripts. Any manuscript requires innumerable decisions about content, language, and style. The freedom of moving beyond generic constraints through crystallization makes this process exponentially more complex, but also invigorating. Wondering enables you to explore options throughout the duration of qualitative projects as new opportunities, insights, and relationships develop. I urge you to set aside time for wondering and (re)answer these questions throughout data collection, analysis, and writing and/or producing art in other media.

WEIGHING YOUR OPTIONS

You can choose from among an infinite number of formats for crystallization, which can both excite and overwhelm researchers, even experienced ones (certainly myself among them). I recommend several strategies to help you along as you consider how to analyze, represent, and format your text(s).

First, intentionally move beyond your comfort zone in at least one area. Embrace crystallization as an opportunity to expand your repertoire of tools and techniques: Try a different genre or medium, engage in a new form of analysis, consider incorporating critical theory, experiment with ways of juxtaposing genres, play with the physical layout of words and voices on the page. Remember that you do not have to choose among your loyalties; you can have your analysis and your narrative too. Ideally, you will produce good work in a variety of genres, but even if you do not produce publishable material in a new genre you experiment with, you still benefit: The exercise will undoubtedly enrich your understanding of some aspects of your self, participants, data, and/or research processes.

Or consider studying a topic area far removed from your current perspective/ daily world. Much good research comes from being able to offer a fresh perspective based upon an outsider's view, often referred to in ethnography as the "etic" point of view, in contrast to the "emic," or insider, perspective (C. A. B. Warren & Karner, 2005). While few endorse old models of the privileged, colonialist scholar going to a community to judge the "natives" according to the (unstated) norms and values of the scholar's (imperialist) culture, that does not mean that ethnographers cannot do excellent work in areas completely new to them. Often an outsider can detect the taken-for-grantedness of daily practices within a setting. Here are a few ideas to get you started in a new area:

- Focus on burning political, moral, or religious questions that intrigue you and for which you long to find (or build) an answer; see where those questions lead you.

- Take a good long look at your everyday life and the thousands of taken-for-granted elements of communication that you unthinkingly use every day; explore one of them.

- Talk to someone you admire about their passions and interests; join in one of their activities and see if it engages you.

- Volunteer in your community. Not only will doing so likely lead you to opportunities to study the experiences and needs of a group of (under-served) people, it will also make you realize how blessed you are.

- Take someone over the age of 70 out for coffee and really listen to them—what they care about, questions they have, places they went, decisions they regret, choices they relish, chances they took. If you don't have older relatives, borrow a friend's, or visit a senior center to invite conversation.

If you decide to go and then to write about (or otherwise represent) where you have never gone before, I suggest you do so in a spirit of humility, positioning yourself as a respectful, grateful student of those whose cultural expertise you would like to learn about. Do not patronize participants by trying to minimize (or conversely to prove) your intelligence or accomplishments; instead, emphasize how much you value the opportunity to learn about the participants' world. In a new setting, you are likely to find both shared ground and

moments of disconnect with participants. That push-pull of identification and difference may lend itself to multigenre expression in which your multiple (perhaps conflicting) perspectives on a setting are each captured via a different genre (Ellingson, 1998).

Second, listen to your data. In each study I have conducted, certain elements, moments, stories, and questions have tugged at my heart and/or my mind, and on more than one occasion, my spirit. Consider what tugs at you in terms of both form and content, and what pops into your mind when you are grocery shopping or driving. Pay attention to those flashes of insight, and they will lead you to the heart of what you need to address. For example, one of the challenges of my ongoing dialysis project that continually tugs at me involves the endless repetition of behaviors in the unit—the same patients come for the same procedure at the same time, with the same group of staff members, three times a week for months or even years (Ellingson, 2007). I find it challenging to form coherent and engaging accounts when, frankly, not much happens most of the time. At the same time, I learned that the unit always buzzes with thousands of tiny signals sent and received among the staff and between patients and staff in such a routinized manner as to give the *illusion* that nothing happens. This endless (re)enactment of routine intrigues me on an intellectual level, but pushes the limits of my writing skills. Engaging representation of the culture of the dialysis unit hinges on the ability to evoke the beauty and pain of the most excruciatingly mundane of actions, such as the rapid stripping of the clear plastic tubing from the dialysis machines following each patient's treatment, or the way the patients weigh themselves at the beginning and end of each treatment. A lengthy narrative (e.g., well-developed short story) of this unit eludes me; I bore myself. So far, I have had the most success with brief anecdote-length narratives that portray moments of interaction between staff and patients, poetic transcription (each constituting a series of fragments), a layered account, and one systematic analysis of routinized communication (Ellingson, 2007).

In contrast, the rhythms of daily life in the geriatric oncology clinic I studied were much more varied and dramatic in nature. Description of the interdisciplinary team felt more compelling when structured to tell a lengthy story of a day in the unit, showing the staff and patients interacting in a myriad of incidents that actually occurred on different days but which I recontextualized into a seamless narrative (see Chapter 2 in Ellingson, 2005a). So many different types of interaction and of consequences of patient diagnosis/prognosis facilitated character development and plot. The contrast of these two health

care ethnographies demonstrates the complexities of the links between form and content of representation. While I can offer researchers no formula for crystallization, I am confident that each project contains the potential for multiple genres of representation, and that clues to those possibilities can be found through careful study of and listening to the data.

Next, try to bracket the voices in your head that tell you that your work blasphemes whichever methodological guru/mentor/program trained you. Such negativity can drown out the voices within your data and your own gut instincts. I do not mean to suggest that you ignore or reject your training or mentors, only that you learn how to set that training and socialization aside temporarily in order to contemplate and experiment with possibilities from a different angle. Writer Anne Lamott (1995) offers a wonderful exercise she recommends for handling critical voices that also lends itself to the type of bracketing I describe here: Close your eyes and picture your advisor, colleagues, journal editor, or whomever as a mouse. Pick this mouse up by the tail and drop it into a large, clear glass jar; repeat for all the disparaging or limiting voices you hear, and then slap a lid on it. Imagine turning the volume up all the way so you can hear a cacophony of voices criticizing you, guilt-tripping you, confusing you. Then turn the volume all the way down and go back to writing. Remember that the "if you're not for us, you're against us," "us/them" mentality reflects a false dichotomy. We can be for more than one methodological approach. Once you have wondered about your project, carefully considering your goals, audiences, and options for your work, commit to producing whatever genre draws you. Set aside your critics and worry about your work's reception later, *not* during the creative process. When you finish, if people tell you that they find your work inconsistent, contradictory, or hypocritical, you can explain yourself using one or more of the specific strategies for promoting and defending crystallization provided in Chapter 8. Of course, they may also simply find your experimental work lousy, a risk we take when we try new genres and media. For now, however, consciously set these outside voices aside.

Additionally, consider balance: Ask yourself how can you show *and* tell, talk *and* listen, move forward *and* step back, portray the personal *and* the political. Try to formulate a text or series of texts that provides not just multiple perspectives but a range of perspectives—group, societal, individual, dyadic, critical, appreciative, and so on. Resist limited notions of abstract or universal "fairness" or "equity" and instead think about what balance best serves your goals for this particular study. For example, I represent the voices of staff members more than those of patients in *Communicating in the Clinic.* That choice

surprised and bothered me for a long time, especially since I empathized so deeply with patients. Further, Dr. Armani and I had (and continue to have via e-mail) rousing debates about my choices to invoke feminist theory in my accounts of him and the rest of the geriatric oncology team. Ultimately, I determined that those representational choices embodied my vision for the book as one that both applauds the work of the team and highlights the limitations of the hierarchical culture of medicine—providing a balance between appreciation and critique.

Moreover, I urge researchers to embrace your own personal satisfaction as an important factor in making choices: Formulate a text or series of texts that reflect and feed your quest for constructing knowledge, helping others, taking political stands, self-exploration, and artistic expression. A text can be about you without having to be *all* about you. Of all the myriad of topics available to me in the geriatric oncology clinic, I chose backstage communication in large part because of its forbidden fruit quality. Having spent years as a patient myself, the behind-the-scenes interactions among health care providers fascinated me. I felt delicious guilty pleasure at witnessing a culture that patients almost never encounter. All researchers have personal reasons for choosing the topics they pursue (Bochner, 1997); I recommend consciously making those reasons part of your decision-making process rather than pretending they do not exist so that no one will accuse you of being biased.

Next, engage in serious play. Stepping outside of the box scares most people. That box can be positivism/validity, the methods and approaches you feel most comfortable with, patriarchal institutional norms, or other familiar routines. Even "experimental" work can function as a limiting box, if that constitutes your usual mode of scholarship. Experimenting with different forms of representation in service of diffuse goals such as enriching our understanding of the world and of our modes of knowledge production seems risky at best, even foolish. You may quite reasonably reason that if your methods are not broken, you need not fix them. But since crystallization provides no one way to proceed, some trial and error always proves necessary. I prefer to think of this process in terms of serious play, rather than in terms of making errors. Play is *fun,* first of all, a concept that often gets lost as we work in academia. A sense of playfulness can help us to enjoy the process of considering our options (Sandelowski, 1994) and potentially assist in avoiding "analytic interruptus," or stopping before we have achieved deep, complex analyses of data (Lofland, 1970, p. 35). Set guilt and loyalties aside and concentrate on what seems like it would be invigorating to do; drudgery does not yield morally, aesthetically, or intellectually superior work, counter to the impression fostered by some number of academics.

Furthermore, consider other aspects of your life—hobbies, previous careers, family traditions, rituals or routines, friends, community organizations you support, spiritual or religious practices—that might provide insights into the possibilities, both literally and figuratively. Bochner (1997) and others have warned that keeping our personal and professionals lives artificially separate forms a fruitless and painful pursuit, and undoubtedly work has crept into our private time on numerous occasions. So reverse the trend; let your "other" interests influence your ideas about representation.

> I have used plays, poetry, pastiche, quilting, and mobiles to help me construct the magic in the phenomenon. . . . Making meaning of data is very much like making magic. . . . To capture the meaning, the gestalt, of the data, one must tap into the creative, magical self. (Hunter et al., 2002, p. 395)

I love scrapbooking, for example, at Friday night gatherings of women who come together to share their week's experiences while sorting and decorating photos. Pasting together disparate pieces of data with decorative and explanatory "embellishments" into a scholarly "scrapbook" forms an apt metaphor for crystallization. Following the rules of a sport while improvising with your own moves also works. Cooking a variety of dishes that together compose a delicious meal hints at yet another way of envisioning crystallization. Invite those metaphors in to your mind to shape your practices. Direct connections may also be possible; video or multimedia photo exhibits could be a great form for an arts-and-crafts devotee or family photographer to explore.

Each of the above suggestions provides a starting point for considering your options for analysis and multigenre representation. Consider several possibilities initially and then narrow, widen, and/or shift your focus as you proceed with your project and encounter new opportunities.

RE/CONSIDERING THE ROLE OF THEORY

In crystallization, "method and theory are reciprocally linked yet necessarily distinguishable" (Madison, 2005, p. 18). The role of theory in qualitative research varies widely, but most qualitative reports draw upon at least some theoretical insights or refer to a specific paradigm in order to contextualize their findings within ongoing scholarly conversations and situate their findings among those of published research. Moreover, researchers cannot approach

analysis or compose narratives (or other artistic representations) completely apart from our store of theory and concepts from our disciplinary training and socialization: "'Reality' is *always already* interpreted. Thus, data never come in the shape of pure drops from an original virgin source; they are always merged with theory at the very moment of their genesis" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000, p. 17, original emphasis).

Of course, myriad ways of defining theory exist. Simply put, a "theory is a consciously elaborated, justified, and uncertain understanding" of phenomena (Babrow & Mattson, 2003, p. 36). Professional standards make it pretty much impossible to publish qualitative analyses in many (even most) scholarly venues without an explicit theoretical framework; this remains especially true in medicine and related health fields, although exceptions exist. On the other hand, if you wrote stories for an organizational Web site, you would probably not include overt references to formal theory, since academic jargon presumably would not engage the public (your intended audience) as well as more accessible prose.

Many qualitative researchers use theory as a guiding framework. Such frameworks serve a number of functions, including "to (1) focus a study, (2) reveal and conceal meaning and understanding, (3) situate research in a scholarly conversation and provide a vernacular, and (4) reveal [the theory's] strengths and weaknesses" (Anfara & Mertz, 2006, p. 192). Theory performs similar functions within projects that involve crystallization, often explicitly in more conventional research reports and implicitly in artistic representations, where theory forms part of the context in which the researcher generated the artwork. I illustrate the functions of theory in Anfara and Mertz's typology as they relate to crystallization using Tracy's (2004a) layered account of emotional labor among correctional officers as an exemplar.

To begin, theories provide focus. Projects seeking to crystallize findings often necessitate even more tightly focused purposes than other qualitative projects because of the complexity of tying together disparate, and often fragmented, representations. Multiple angles illuminate, but they can also obscure and confuse if researchers do not provide sufficient tools for connecting them. A discussion of theory—whether in essay form, a series of quotes, an anecdote that exemplifies theoretical axioms, or what have you—can serve the vital function of making clear the focus of the inquiry. Tracy (2004a) invoked Hochschild's (1983) emotion labor theory, signifying that the scope of her ethnographic inquiry focused on the ways in which correctional officers

experienced, controlled, and expressed emotions in what society considers to
be stigmatized "dirty work" (see Drew, Mills, & Gassaway, 2007). Moreover,
Tracy seeks to complexify this theory, which "has largely relied on a dichoto-
mous portrayal of real and false self (Tracy & Trethewey, 2003)," by prob-
lematizing the real/false duality with postmodern theorizing about discourse
and the self; "philosophies from Foucault can assist in explicating the role of
discourse in constructing and harnessing emotional identity" (Tracy, 2004a,
p. 525). Intersections of emotion labor theory with Foucault's (1977) work on
the creation and disciplining of identities map out a territory for Tracy's
inquiry into the socially constructed world of correctional officers. Both the
narratives and the academic prose highlight a wide range of emotions, includ-
ing anger, disgust, fear, excitement, pride, confusion, pity, amusement, and
embarrassment.

Second, theories reveal and conceal meaning, a function particularly
suited to complex crystallized representations that play with conventions of
revealing and concealing through choices of genre. In the same way that nar-
ratives foreground particularities of individual experience while background-
ing larger patterns of meaning, theoretical frameworks draw readers' attention
to certain aspects of meaning and in so doing necessarily deemphasize others.
Concealing is not a weakness; indeed, it constitutes an inevitable cost of sense
making, since you can never equally foreground all aspects of a story, aca-
demic or otherwise. Emotion labor theory and Foucault's (1977) theorizing on
discipline and identity foreground the role of institutions such as prisons on the
identities of those within the institutions and how emotional expression both
reflects and creates identities. Tracy acknowledges the partiality of her account
and the impossibility of fully representing all perspectives, such as that of the
inmates and of the general public, in her study of correctional officers. Her
choice of theoretical framing offers an intelligible means for highlighting the
types of performances that interest her:

> In devising performances that attempt to achieve [organizational] expecta-
> tions, officers not only engage in their own brand of stoic emotion labor but also
> play a part in constructing organizationally harnessed emotional identities—
> identities that are marked by paranoia, withdrawal, detachment, and an "us-
> them" approach toward inmates. (Tracy, 2004a, p. 529)

Tracy does not merely describe these performed identities analytically, she
invites readers to experience them by offering narratives of her ethnographic

experiences. Her description of an incident in which officers found a prisoner in possession of drugs provides an illustration:

> Officers Brankett and Jones are writing up reports on the strip searches, uri-nalyses, and cell shakedowns. . . . The officers, who are usually so no non-sense and tough with the inmates, are excited, almost girlish. Jones looks in my direction and squeals, "This was a *really* good bust!" . . . Brankett explains to me, "We search them and search them and usually find nothing. This one, finally, was a good bang for the buck!" I note Jones's use of the sex-ual metaphor as well as the duo's goofy, giggly, flirty demeanors as they reconstruct the events of the evening. (p. 527)

At the same time, Tracy deemphasizes important issues outside the purview of her inquiry, for example, the role of public perception of crime and punish-ment on the regulation of the prison-industrial complex by state and federal government and the impact of prison reform activists on correctional officers' training.

Theory's third function involves providing scholarly contextualization and a vernacular—in other words, a set of common tools particular to a defined scholarly speech community. In crystallized texts, vernacular or jargon pro-vides a means for shorthand communication, provided that readers know the speech codes of the community. Researchers should take great care in defin-ing or at least citing references for all terms that may exclude members of the audience they want to reach. Achieving clarity without bogging down in excessive definitions constitutes a major challenge in crystallization, because different genres require varying vocabularies. For instance, the term "embod-ied ethnography" immediately conjures for trained ethnographers images of a participant observer in the field carefully noting smells, tastes, textures, tem-perature, and other sensuous details within fieldnotes. For others—including intelligent, learned, creative others—this term holds no clear meaning, and its use may function at best as a sign of disinterest toward the audience's needs or at worst one of intentional exclusion of nonexperts. Reading unfamiliar jargon may also simply bore readers. For example, I have struggled to reach medical and allied health audiences who cannot be assumed to understand standpoint theory (Harding, 1991), Foucault's (1977) analysis of the relationship between power and knowledge, or feminist critiques of bureaucracy (Ferguson, 1984). Nonetheless, I value the vocabularies provided by communication theory and research, as well as those from medical sociology, anthropology, women's

studies/feminist inquiry, nursing, social work, education, medical humanities, and medicine. Like any tool, theory proves useful for some tasks and not others; terms enable us to label, explicate, compare, and differentiate among ideas, making it possible to highlight subtle shades of meaning. Tracy's (2004a) examination of correctional officers utilized the terms emotion work, voyeurism, and differentiation, drawn from emotion labor theory, as well as Goffman's concept of "total institutions" to explain her findings. Tracy also utilizes scholarly concepts to explain aspects of her methodology, such as when she states, "I interrogated and problematized my own role in the story I presumed to collect—a process that Fine et al. (2000) call, 'coming clean at the hyphen' (p. 123)" (p. 521).

Moreover, jargon can also serve a function even when its meaning remains less than fully clear (or completely opaque) to readers by prob-lematizing the authority of the author. While this technique potentially alien-ates readers, elitist, power-laden discourse nonetheless provides a sharp contrast with narratives and other more accessible genres, serving a decon-structive purpose by reinforcing the partiality of the theoretical account. Crystallization reveals the wholly constructed, nonnatural status of scholarly jargon as an academic game. While not a game without value, theoretical analysis and argumentation also cannot claim a naturalized status as objec-tively real. In other words, asserting jargon that your audience may not understand helps to resist the dominating effects of science if the audience sees through the attempt.

Let me offer a funny story that illustrates the potential for jargon to back-fire, rendering itself ridiculous, or at least suspect, rather than authoritative. I participated in a strategic planning meeting with a group of people who did not know each other very well. The facilitator invited us to engage in an "ice-breaker" activity called "two truths and a lie." The idea was for group members to get to know each other by having each member share with the others two truths and a lie about themselves. The group members then tried to guess which one of the person's three statements was the lie. During my turn, I said: "I have had fifteen surgeries, my husband Glenn and I spent our honeymoon in France, and I am writing a book on a form of postmodern methodological triangulation called qualitative crystallization." Every person in the room guessed that I lied about my book project, when actually I had lied about the location of our hon-eymoon. When I laughed and asked why, they said that such a jargon-laden sen-tence could not possibly be *real;* it sounded too "made up." I share this story not

to encourage researchers to risk alienating their readers by drowning them in abstract theoretical ruminations but to assure them that some obscuring effects of social science prose (when used strategically) can potentially reinforce the crystallized validity of multigenre texts by emphasizing the contrasting episte-mologies underlying the contrasting representations. All representational con-ventions are "made up"—none exists in an independent reality.

Finally, theories reveal their own strengths and weaknesses when used as frameworks, and this too may be evident in and benefit crystallization. Juxtaposition of poetic and artistic accounts with social science prose points to strengths and weaknesses. We need not dismiss the weaknesses of a given the-ory in crystallized accounts as mere "limitations" of the inquiry that must be begrudgingly acknowledged at the end of the standard research report. Instead, such weaknesses become more data for analysis, another part of the picture, another node in the network of meaning. Rather than apologizing for inevitably partial accounts (including theories), we can celebrate them as addi-tional points of view or facets of the crystal. Tracy's (2004a) account of the complexities of correctional officers' identities and emotional performances reveals the strength of emotion labor theory in accounting for the intense work involved in producing appropriate displays of emotion in a difficult environ-ment. At the same time, readers perceive the weaknesses of the theory in nar-ratives that illustrate how much else goes on in correctional settings.

I do not advise slapping a theoretical frame onto a multigenre text if it does not fit and enhance the project's goals. On the other hand, if a specific theory or perspective guided your project, by all means include it in some way in your crystallized text. Ideally, the theory will help you to make a persuasive account of your ideas: "A useful theory is one that tells an enlightening story about some phenomenon. It is a story that gives you new insights and broad-ens your understanding of the phenomenon" (Anfara & Mertz, 2006, p. xvii). Many possibilities exist for useful theories in qualitative research, any of which can then potentially be used in a crystallized account. Social construc-tionism (e.g., Gergen, 1994, 1999; Hacking, 1999; Holstein & Gubrium, 2008) provides a broad basis for qualitative inquiry, while many other theories may illuminate certain aspects of a given project. I provide a brief overview of the-oretical perspectives, cautioning readers that these are intended merely as jumping-off points, not as circumscription of possibilities.

Theoretical perspectives on power and knowledge are common in qualita-tive research; for instance, Foucault's (1977, 1979, 1980) work on disciplinary

power and resistance (e.g., Edley, 2000; Gillespie, 2001; Zoller, 2003) and Croft's use of Fiske's (1993) theory of imperializing and localizing power. Researchers also widely employ feminist theories of the gendered nature of power and resistance, including the feminist case against bureaucracy (Ferguson, 1984), feminist standpoint theory (Harding, 1991), subaltern counterpublics (Fraser 1990–1991), and strategic essentializing (Spivak, 1988). Performance theory, drawing on such theorists as Butler (1990; e.g., Lindemann, 2007, 2008; Morgan & Krone, 2001; Murphy, 2001; Tracy, 2002; J. T. Warren, 2001), and dialectical theory (Adelman & Frey, 1997; Alemán, 2001; Geist-Martin, Carnett, & Slauta, 2008) provide other common perspectives. Other examples of theories used to guide qualitative research include symbolic convergence theory (Lesch, 1994), play theory (Brooks & Bowker, 2002), structuration theory (Howard & Geist, 1995), and peer cluster theory (DeSantis, 2002).

Some qualitative studies seek to extend existing theory or models. M. Miller (1995), in her study of a family of four generations of women who had attempted suicide, extended the "basic suicidal syndrome outlined by Breed (1972)" (p. 264) with a model of communication that described the "intersubjective experience of the mother–daughter relationship and the perpetuation of the suicidal tradition" (p. 268). Similarly, in my research on a health care team (Ellingson, 2003), I extended the bona fide group perspective (Putnam & Stohl, 1990) with the concept of "embedded teamwork," that is, work done in dyads and triads of team members outside of formal meetings (see also Lammers & Krikorian, 1997). Finally, Tracy (2004b) extended theoretical perspectives on framing by developing a model of framing techniques for organizational tensions that suggests that employees commonly frame tensions as simple contradictions, complementary dialectics, or pragmatic paradoxes.

Theory also can lurk in the background in crystallized accounts, informing without taking center stage. Lather and Smithies' (1997) work with women living with HIV/AIDS used no overarching theory, although it wove references to published research and some brief mentions of concepts from theorists such as Foucault (1979) and Benjamin (1968). I found that Goffman's (1959) framework could also offer useful concepts without unduly restricting my ability to accomplish several descriptive, critical, and analytical goals at once. In fact, Goffman and other social constructionist or symbolic interactionist frames tend to work quite well with crystallization projects that combine creative and analytic representations, since such frameworks highlight the performance of self in interaction, mirroring the goal of showing and telling through contrasting epistemological claims embedded in multiple genres.

Finally, theory can be a form of personal and social intervention. Feminist theorist bell hooks explains that she

> came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most important, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing. (hooks, 1994, p. 59)

Like hooks, we need to make sense of our everyday experiences in our embodied, situated lives, and theory can help us to do that. Theory can be accessible, helpful, and potentially empowering, not just intellectual, and it can play a vital role in the process of crystallization. Theory may provide concepts and angles of vision that serve as useful tools to the practitioners, public, or other stakeholders to whom we bring our crystallized research in a variety of genres. Theoretical sensibilities also can be a vital tool offered by academics in dialogue with research participants (A. W. Frank, 2005).

Some issues to reflect on as you decide on what role theory will play in your crystallized project:

- *Audience:* Who are my intended audiences, and what are their expectations for theory? How does setting up a theoretical framework provide a useful foundation for my account? How can I explain key terminology to those unfamiliar with it?

- *Your theory toolbox:* What theories am I familiar with that might help me to frame my analyses? What theories seem to emerge as relevant as I immerse myself in my data?

- *Connections/situating your work:* What disciplinary, professional, and critical discourses do I invoke with my use of a particular theory? Am I comfortable with those alliances? Why and/or why not?

- *Representation:* How would theory get in the way of my ability to make claims, tell tales, or otherwise creatively and evocatively represent my ideas? How would theory facilitate or enhance these same processes? Where else could I put theory, in addition to within the main narrative—endnotes, appendices, parallel voices on the page?

Again, I suggest journaling to play with these questions and urge researchers to think outside the box for creative ways to include theory in crystallized texts.

DECIDE ON A DESIGN

At some point, you must come to a preliminary decision on the scope and form of your project. I advise that you write it down and that your decision have three parts: thesis statement(s), genre selections, and a plan.

Thesis Statement(s)

As a holdover from my training as a college policy debater and my years of teaching public speaking, I favor clear, concise thesis statements. You need a well-articulated thesis statement, or perhaps a few of them if you pursue a book-length manuscript. While you need not include this statement in your work per se (depending upon your choices of format, genre, etc.), your ability to write it down for yourself as a guide for your project is paramount; if you cannot do this, you have insufficient focus and direction for your project and need to do more reflection. The statement can be adapted at any time, but it must exist as a focal point for your project. As an illustration, consider the role clearly articulated thesis statements played in the production of a book-length ethnography. In the process of writing *Communicating in the Clinic,* my examination of team communication evolved slowly into an exploration of backstage clinical communication. Once I devised a set of three definitive claims that formed the foundation for my book, I had a much easier time making other analytic and representational decisions. I went back and refined the statements as I worked through the project until I completed the final version of the manuscript. I elected to include my thesis statements in the introductory chapter to my book in order to set the stage for the remainder of my crystallized account. I considered this particularly important because the next chapter took the form of an extended narrative, and I wanted readers to encounter that story with my conclusions in mind.[1] My thesis statements for the project included

- Teamwork must be recognized as taking place outside of designated team meetings, through informal communication channels, and in dyads and triads of team members, rather than as primarily occurring within full team meetings.

- Backstage team communication (communication among team members without patients present) is interwoven intricately with frontstage

(health care provider–patient communication); the boundaries between these are fluid and permeable, not sharply delineated as they are currently theorized.

• Team communication is heavily constrained and shaped by persistent gender, racial, class, and disciplinary hierarchies in the medical establishment; structural and individual inequalities are not natural, neutral, or inevitable, and they are integral to the daily enactment of teamwork through communication. (Ellingson, 2005a, p. 8)

The narratives, analysis, and critiques I wrote all centered on these statements and the intersections thereof. I opted to include them in just this form to enhance the clarity of my book. You must decide for yourself whether such an explicit statement increases the clarity of your work, needlessly or even harmfully bashes readers over the head with a definitive interpretation, or perhaps could be integrated into the account in a more implicit manner. Regardless of how you use it, however, I strongly advise articulating your thesis statement before you go too far along, and periodically revisit it as you progress.

Genres

Based upon your consideration of the questions and issues raised in your design process in the previous chapter, make a decision about the approximate length, genres, and types of outlets (journal, book, literary magazine, etc.) you will target. As with your thesis statement, you can (and should) remain open to change down the road as ideas emerge, but you need at least a starting point. I know many writers would not agree with me, preferring to allow "writing as a method of inquiry" to be quite a literal process of simply applying pen to paper, fingers to keyboard, or brush to paint and see what comes up. Extreme openness can be overwhelming and immobilizing, however, and I recommend using journal writing as the space in which to write as inquiry and to come up with ideas for structure and genres, at least in the beginning. I recommend that you consider genres as you collect and analyze data, make an initial selection, start writing, and then make changes to generic choices if needed.

For example, in my study of the interdisciplinary geriatric oncology clinic, I considered writing the manuscript in the form of an extended layered account or having one or two lengthy narratives in each chapter that exemplified the

analytical concepts in the chapter. I finally decided that moving back and forth so frequently among genres and forms of evidence would be too distracting and make too many demands on my readers over the course of a book. I selected four genres, each of which would characterize one chapter: ethno-graphic narrative, grounded theory analysis, autoethnography, and feminist critique. I chose them because they spoke to my disparate scholarly and ideo-logical commitments, fit with my data, and supported the thesis statements about which I felt most strongly. Moreover, I reasoned that if I could not find a publisher open to publishing my crystallized account as a multigenre text, I could separate each of the chapters into articles (albeit with some loss of mean-ing) and publish them in qualitative methods, applied communication, and fem-inist journals, respectively. Keep in mind the audiences and types of publication venues you wish to reach as you chose your genres.

Plan

Create an informal outline, or what Madison (2005) calls a "muse map" (p. 183), a list of what you are going to do and the approximate order in which you plan to do it. I recommend mapping whether you plan to pursue an inte-grated multigenre text (see Chapter 5) or a series of related but separate texts (dendritic crystallization; see Chapter 6), or both. This can be informal; feel free to shed complex alphanumeric structures and create your own flexible, heuristic format that helps you get your ideas organized. Visual representations may also prove helpful, not just listing but mapping and modeling ideas in order to understand their relationships to each other (Hunter et al., 2002, p. 392). Visualizing relationships among your thesis statement(s), genres, data, theory, and research literature may help you not only get organized but deepen your understanding of your project (see Clarke, 2005).

The map becomes an important resource for you as you write any proj-ect, but especially in crystallization because the complexity of your represen-tation necessitates careful coordination. The map is not the territory, but in this case, it can be at least partially constitutive of the territory. We do not map external realities, but create them. As you build a map, you provide your-self with a representation. No fixed reality exists for you to capture through your research; instead, endless opportunities abound. You build a world as you represent your choices on a map, and you can always change those choices. But to try to go without a map is to go not just into uncharted territory, but often

into a void. Instead of freeing you, it can bind you, leaving you lost among your data and ideas. As you co-create your world, map its contours. At the same time, do not be afraid that a map will overly constrict you; no matter how carefully you follow a map, you will always notice unexpected side roads, landmarks will appear suddenly, or the view around the corner will prove stunning and you will pause to explore it in much greater detail than you planned. The informal outline or map remains flexible throughout your project; you can and will deviate from it.

You should feel free to make your map in any analog or digital format in which you enjoy working. I prefer to use the hyperlinked capabilities of an inexpensive software program for Macintosh computers called "Voodoo Pad"[2] that enables hyperlinked cross-referencing between ideas, outlines, project status notes, "to do" lists, and any other textual or visual data you want to add. Other people prefer colored pens and notebooks, spreadsheet software, drawing paper, or copious use of sticky notes. Wander through a stationery, office supply, or arts supply store to see what is available, and then experiment to find what works best for you.

As part of the mapping process, I also recommend that you have a place to store ideas for the future, both related to your current project and to potential new ones. As I plan, reflect, write, and map, I often receive new insights. Through the construction of multigenre texts, I encounter a range of social scientific/empirical, theoretical, critical, narrative, poetic, and performance texts and experiment in a hands-on manner with the constraints and possibilities of genres and truth claims and positioning of myself as an author. This in turn opens up new vistas of reading and writing. Ideas pop into my head unbidden as I read and write. I recommend keeping a journal or file where you note these ideas down for later consideration. Productivity guru David Allen (2002) calls this a "someday/maybe" file and advises people to check through it on a regular basis to discard, add to, and act on ideas stored within it.

CONCLUSION

The design processes sketched here do not constitute discrete steps that begin when collecting data ends, but ongoing processes that precede, overlap with, and follow data collection. The looseness of the processes should not cloud their importance to producing a high-quality qualitative research

project. The following two chapters provide further detail on engaging in crystallization to produce coherent multigenre texts/representations (Chapter 5), a series of dispersed texts/representations illuminating a qualitative data set (Chapter 6), or both.

INTERLUDE

Beware the Law of the Hammer

The law of the hammer states that if you have a hammer as your only tool, you tend to search for opportunities in which to hammer things, rather than looking for interesting opportunities and then choosing an appropriate tool. Many of you may be familiar with Lee Hay and Pete Seeger's (1958) famous folk song, "If I Had a Hammer," which joyfully suggests hammering morning, noon, and night. Hammering can be useful, but only in some circumstances. The hammer swinger sees many nails, but few screws, threads, plants, foodstuffs, or other items that cannot best be addressed through repeated bonking with a blunt object.

I invoke "the law of the hammer" as a playful—and hopefully memorable—metaphor to encourage methodological pluralism. Nonetheless, this lighthearted label refers to the serious issue of limiting the types of questions we can answer about the world to only those that fit a single methodological tool. For many scholars, a method such as statistics, grounded theory, narratives, or performance became their methodological or representational hammer, and they now hit every question they propose with that tool, even if another tool may prove vastly more suitable to illuminating the nuances of a particular topic, problem, or setting. This tendency fails to surprise me; no one receives training in all methods, and of those we are taught or teach ourselves, we inevitably prefer some over others. Moreover, we are attracted not only to certain types of methods, but to specific types of questions that tend to fit with our preferred methods. In other words, these preferences develop iteratively, and often our preferred method also fits our posed questions. Furthermore, reliance on a single hammer is not limited to those working within positivist or postpositivist paradigms; researchers across the expanse of the qualitative continuum uphold the law of the hammer.

However, when we employ a variety of tools, we can address a broader range of questions; you could hammer a nail/question, but if you had a set of pliers, you also could bend the nail and use it to fashion a hook, for instance. Thus, if you work primarily in grounded theory, I urge you to reflect about what else could be done to interpret and represent your data more evocatively. For example, in the same way

that many of us excerpt part of our data set as case studies (e.g., Buzzanell & Ellingson, 2005), you could also excerpt an individual participant's story as a narrative (e.g., Ellingson, 2008c), write some poetry or poetic transcript of interviews, or produce a performance piece for your participants and/or other audiences. If you generally produce artistic work, I encourage you to reflect on what patterns in your data could be highlighted, what systematic questions you could ask and answer in order to add to the body of knowledge in your discipline, persuade policy makers, provide informational resources to your participants, generate practical advice for practitioners serving those participants or others like them, and/or gain a new perspective on the larger sociopolitical context of your evocative accounts, connecting the local to national or global trends.

Keep in mind that disciplinary and methodological loyalties are not moral in nature; dallying in other representational arenas constitutes ethically sound practice. Indeed, such intellectual and creative variety may improve your understanding of the workings of habitually favored methods (Fine et al., 2000; Richardson, 2000b). I have often felt self-conscious about my divided loyalties, which I tend to think of as between the health communication community and the ethnographers. But some ethnographers conduct grounded theory (e.g., Tracy, 2002, 2004a), and some health communication scholars engage in narrative work (e.g., Harter et al., 2005). Put down the hammer and pick up a tool box, and you can do a lot of good. Of course, you can also make mistakes; learning a new tool often proves difficult, and all research methods should be approached with respect and after securing guidance from a more experienced tool wielder. Early efforts may not net work of publishable quality for some time. Do not let that trouble you; no education or experiment is ever wasted. However, you must also balance such experimentation with good judgment. Students, junior and contingent faculty, and others particularly vulnerable to negative consequences of devaluation of their work should be sure to complete some work with representational comfort zones that meet institutional scholarly standards while exploring other tools in the methodological box.

NOTES

1. Of course, I could also argue for the benefit of readers delving into the narrative without the preparation of my agenda for the account. Certainly their experience of its meanings varies according to whether they have in mind how I want them, in part, to interpret the interactions I portray. And readers' interpretations are further reshaped upon reading the next three chapters, which offer more analysis and more narrative, further complexifying the reading of the narrative—this is a strength of crystallization.

2. Voodoo Pad resembles an Internet "wiki" but remains contained on your personal computer rather than online. It is available for trial downloads and for purchase at www.flyingmeat.com. I receive no financial consideration from the producers of this product, and share it only with the hope of others finding it useful.