



10-7-2013

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### Recommended APA Citation

Nelson, J. A., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Wines, L. A., & Frels, R. K. (2013). The Therapeutic Interview Process in Qualitative Research Studies. *The Qualitative Report*, 18(40), 1-17. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol18/iss40/1>

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to describe the systemic strategies used in marriage and family therapy relevant to interviews, via what we call the therapeutic interview process, that expand the meaning of a research study for both the counselor researcher and the participant(s). We outline the therapeutic interview process for conducting transformative - based interviews via similar strategies from a family systems perspective conceptualized by Charlés (2007). The central core of the interview process is the therapeutic conversation itself that involves the systemic whole. This therapeutic conversation is facilitated by debriefing interviews, whereby the counselor researcher is interviewed to promote reflexivity

### Keywords

Interviews, Therapeutic Interview Process, Counselor Researcher, Family Systems

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## The Therapeutic Interview Process in Qualitative Research Studies

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### The Therapeutic Interview Process in Qualitative Research Studies

Interviews represent one of the most effective ways to collect data in qualitative research because they provide the researcher with opportunities for rich data and meaning making (Warren, 2002). In particular, interviews represent a useful method of obtaining information about families and individual family members (Beitin, 2008). As such, in many counseling fields, including the field of marriage and family therapy, interviews have been the most utilized qualitative method (Gehart, Ratliff, & Lyle, 2001).

Because interviewing is an important part for many clinicians representing the counseling fields due to its ability to capture the client's voice, these clinicians might assume that "interviewing is as similar as breathing" (Thorne, 2008, p. 78). However, this line of thinking might render them resistant to changing their styles of interviewing appropriately—if at all—to adjust to the interview context and to meet the needs of the interviewee(s). Thus, more guidance is needed to help clinicians in general and counseling researchers in particular confront the challenges in transitioning to research interviewing. Such guidance is particularly needed for counselor researchers, who, when conducting research interviews, must change their mindset from viewing themselves as the experts to treating the research participants (i.e., interviewees) as experts regarding their own experiences. Such a shift in thinking has occurred in some perspectives of viewing clients in therapy. For example, Anderson and Goolishian (1992) described their shift from simply processing information during therapy to a more hermeneutic and interpretive position that placed "heavy emphasis on the role of language, conversation, self, and story" (p. 28). The role of the therapist became one of *not-knowing*, which meant that the therapist's understanding of a client's situation is not limited by pre-determined theoretical points of view or prior experiences. As such, the therapist did not have a *privileged* viewpoint of understanding the client's situation

(Wachterhauser, 1986). Moreover, just as therapeutic practitioners must continually reinvent themselves to stay relevant and essential to current and prospective clients (Winslade, 2009); counselor researchers also must continually seek out the most effective ways to gather and to analyze data.

Because wellness is seen as the paradigm for the field of counseling (Myers & Sweeney, 2008), we believe that, in certain instances—that is, depending on the research question and the overall goal of the study—the transformative conception of interviewing (Roulston, 2010) is the most pertinent to counselor researchers. It is important to note that Clarke (2006) discussed the potential harm to clients that might result from qualitative interviewing (see also Boudah & Lenz, 2000; Bussell, Matsey, Reiss, & Heatherington, 1995); and we agree that is a danger. Berger and Malkinson (2000) enumerate seven aspects of the research process that might have therapeutic implications for participants, offer a perspective on ethical responsibilities of research considering these therapeutic implications, and caution researchers about possible negative unintended outcomes for participants. Other authors (Corbin & Morse, 2005; Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2006) also address issues of risk and ethical challenges when conducting qualitative interviews.

As such, what is needed in qualitative interviewing are specific strategies garnered from counselor training for conducting transformative interviewing. From their training as practitioners, counselor researchers possess skills such as empathic responding; multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills; and the ability to be reflexive. We believe these skills guide counselor researchers and help in their awareness of how qualitative interviewing might impact their participants. Therefore, for the remainder of this article, as counselor researchers, we propose a model— what we call the *therapeutic interview process*—for conducting transformative-based interviews, wherein the *process* of the data collection may generate meaning that is as important as the data themselves, and has the potential to be curative and therapeutic to everyone involved, including the primary investigator, the research participants, members of dissertation/thesis committees, transcribers, and any other stakeholders. We believe, as relationship experts, counselor researchers are in a unique position to empower research participants while, at the same time, experience deep and meaningful connections with them.

It is our intent to provide a new and unique framework in counselor research that will enhance the way we conduct research interviews in the field of professional counseling. This new framework is unique in that the process is delineated as a primary consideration, systemic strategies are important aspects of the interviewing techniques, and the interview process is mapped within expanded systems. Additionally, the researcher is more intimately connected to the interview development through a process called the interview of the interpretive researcher (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2008), which the authors describe as a new type of debriefing interview in qualitative research. The rationale for debriefing the researcher in qualitative studies includes enhancing reflexivity through a thorough examination of the biases of the researcher.

Specifically, in our article, we describe how the therapeutic interview process—similar to family systems therapy strategies—expands the meaning of a research study for both the counselor researcher and the participant(s), creating unexpected change in each person involved. We explore a variety of theoretical perspectives in systems theory that is relevant to how each perspective might be similar to and useful in the therapeutic interview process in qualitative research studies.

## A Therapeutic Interview Process

As researchers, we are interested in the idea that, similar to family therapy sessions, interviews in qualitative research can be beneficial and curative for researchers and participants alike. Heppner, Kivlighan, and Wampold (1999) found parallels between the phenomenological interview and the therapeutic interview and the importance of the relationship between researcher and participant during the interview process or during the research process. Other researchers have explored the idea of a multifaceted relationship between qualitative research and family therapy (Haene, 2010). A comparable approach in qualitative research and family therapy has been the development of postmodern thinking (Anderson, 1997) marked by both narrative and social constructionist perspectives (Haene, 2010).

Family systems thinking, in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, assists us as qualitative researchers in organizing our ideas about the *research system* that might include the researcher, co-researchers, participants, transcribers, research assistants, dissertation/thesis committee members, institutional review boards, peer and professional consultants, funding institutions, and other stakeholders (e.g., from the larger systems such as schools, political entities, or agencies). The systems outlook used by marriage and family therapists is a way to think about clients, the nature of their problem situations, and the possibilities for change (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008). As noted by Gehart and Tuttle (2003), a systemic approach brings a team of counselors who reflect a collective mindset that incorporates self-reflecting and self-appraising. Moreover, a systems outlook attends to a family's structure (e.g., how it organizes and maintains itself) as well as to its *processes* (e.g., how it evolves, adapts, or changes) as an ongoing and living system (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008). A family systems perspective and systemic language have been identified in fields other than family therapy (Charlés, 2007).

In hostage negotiation, Charlés (2007), who analyzed the dialogue between a team of law enforcement officers and a hostage taker during a hostage-taking incident at a high school, identified nine interactional communication strategies used by these law enforcement officers that were valued by systemic family therapists. Like Charlés (2007), we find interactional communication strategies as found in family systems therapy relevant to the therapeutic interview process. Thus, we have modified these nine strategies as follows:

1. establishing and maintaining a relationship with the client (interviewee);
2. understanding the context of interviewee's experiences;
3. using the language of the interviewee;
4. including expanded or larger systems in the interview;
5. maintaining flexibility in conversation;
6. attending to the process of the interview;
7. using a *restraining* or *go slow* approach;
8. using a team process effectively; and
9. ending and summarizing the interview process.

These nine strategies comprise what we call the therapeutic interview process.

Figure 1 depicts the therapeutic interview process with respect to each of the nine strategies. From this figure, it is evident that our therapeutic interview process occurs within concentric circles. As such, we conceptualize our therapeutic interview process as representing an iterative, interactive, integrative, integrated, integral, emerging, holistic, synergistic, and transformative process. By iterative, we mean that the qualitative interviewer goes back and forth in utilizing some or all of these strategies. By interactive, we imply that

the nine strategies that underlie the therapeutic interview process are inter-dependent. By integrative, we suggest that an interview process that combines multiple and diverse approaches within a centralized mode of delivery. Integrated connotes making into a whole by bringing all parts (i.e., strategies) together. By integral, we indicate that the effectiveness of our therapeutic interview process depends on the collective willingness of the researcher and participant(s) to co-construct knowledge (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004) in a united quest for addressing the underlying research questions. By emerging, we mean that the therapeutic interview process is both fluid and flexible. By holistic, we mean that the interview process should incorporate the major works in the area of criteria for assessing the quality of interviews (e.g., Onwuegbuzie et al., 2008; Roulston, 2010). By synergistic, we mean that our therapeutic interview process involves “striking a balance between a design that would provide sufficient structure and direction while remaining flexible enough to respond to the applied real world research environment” (Hall & Howard, 2008, p. 249), as well as using a dialectic approach to qualitative interviewing that involves incorporating diverse perspectives to interviewing. Finally, and most importantly, by transformative, we mean that the therapeutic interview process has at its root the transformative conception of interviewing, wherein, as noted previously, the interviewer and interviewee “develop ‘transformed’ or ‘enlightened’ understandings as an outcome of dialogical interaction” (Roulston, 2010, p. 220). More specifically, we incorporate Frels’ (2010) concept of “two-way interactive transformative-emancipatory approach” (p. 21), in which members of both sides of the interview relationships—namely, the interviewer and interviewee—are transformed in a positive manner as a result of undergoing the interview process.

As seen in Figure 1, a therapeutic researcher negotiates each strategy with the participant(s) through therapeutic conversation, including a point of entry (i.e., establishing and maintaining a relationship with the interviewee) and a point of exit (i.e., ending and summarizing the interview process). It can be seen that the arrows go to and from therapeutic conversation to each of the nine strategies. The arrows going from therapeutic conversation to each strategy indicate that each strategy is moderated by the therapeutic conversation. For example, the therapeutic conversation helps to determine the speed with which the interview process takes place. The arrows going from each strategy to therapeutic conversation indicate that each strategy also shapes the therapeutic conversation. For instance, the research question(s) (e.g., number of research questions, complexity of the research question[s]), study design, and the characteristics of the participant (e.g., how much time the participant has to be interviewed; the participant’s knowledge of, or exposure to, the construct of interest) affect the speed with which the interview process takes place, which in turn, affects the therapeutic conversation.

Further, the therapeutic conversation is shaped by and shapes what Onwuegbuzie et al. (2008) refer to as debriefing-the-researcher interviews—hence double-sided arrow between these two elements. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2008) developed interview questions that facilitate reflexivity of interviewers by reflecting “on their historical, socio-cultural, and geographical situatedness, the biases they bring to the study, their personal investment in and commitment to the study, and so forth” (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008, p. 201). These authors designed a framework for debriefing the interpretive researcher that provides guidelines for the therapeutic interview process (see also, Chenail, 2011). First, a trusted and knowledgeable person who is not involved in the study should conduct the debriefing interview. Second, the interview should be audiotaped or videotaped. Third, the debriefing interviewer should not be a stakeholder. Fourth, the interviewer should be someone who has interviewing experience conducting qualitative research studies. Utilizing Onwuegbuzie et al.’s (2008) debriefing technique of interviewing the interpretive researcher, a therapeutic researcher reflects and recognizes ways to impact the larger system.

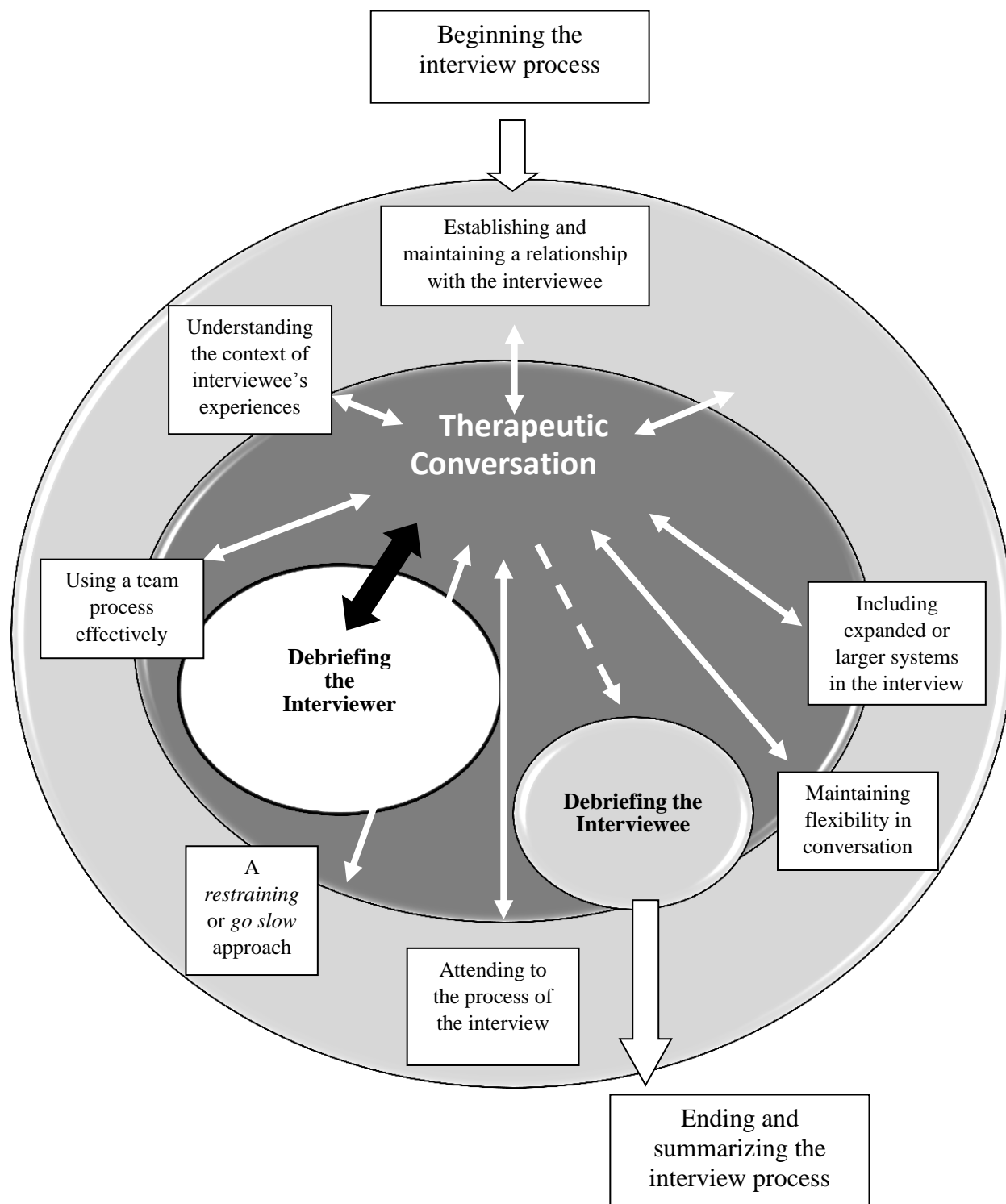


Figure 1. The iterative, interactive, integrative, integrated, integral, emerging, holistic, synergistic, and transformative therapeutic interview process.

As such, Figure 1 depicts the central role of both the therapeutic conversation and the debriefing interviews. We posit that the therapeutic interview process ultimately is the result of interactions and collaboration between the interviewer and the interviewee using the nine therapeutic interview strategies to enhance the outcomes of the interview process. In addition,

the debriefing interviews of the counselor researcher significantly facilitate the ability of the counselor researcher and the participant(s) to have a therapeutic conversation and to enhance the authenticity of the entire research process. Each of these nine strategies and their relationship to the counselor researcher's personal thoughts and feelings is discussed in the following sections.

### **Family Therapy and Qualitative Research Interviews**

#### **Strategy 1: Establishing and Maintaining a Relationship with the Client or Interviewee**

Structural family therapists begin the process of therapy by adjusting to the family's style (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008). Thus, establishing and maintaining a relationship with the client or interviewee represents the entry point in our therapeutic interview process. Minuchin (1974) described this process as *joining* with the family and *accommodating* to their particular style. Similarly, Rossman and Rallis (2003) described the characteristics of qualitative research including the humanistic and interactive nature of this type of inquiry, with the researcher being highly involved in the actual experiences of the participants. By joining the co-researchers on equal terms, voices of the marginalized, disenfranchised, and all humans are valued and recorded.

#### **Strategy 2: Matching the Language of the Interviewee**

Part of maintaining a relationship with the interviewee includes the interviewer matching the language of the interviewee, whenever possible. By matching the language, the counselor researcher validates the interviewee's experiences and perceptions and demonstrates positive regard. Indeed, a shared language or dialect has been found to facilitate communication in a positive way by enabling the interviewee to believe that her/his perceptions and views have been adequately and accurately transmitted and understood (Fallon & Brown, 2002). As concluded by Nazroo (2006), "the need to communicate the questions and understand the answers means that a shared vocabulary, which language matching brings, is paramount" (p. 65) and "where the emphasis is on hearing the respondent's story in their own words, the need for a shared vocabulary is paramount" (p. 73). We contend that the interviewer matching the language of the interviewee increases the likelihood of what we call *therapeutic transformation*.

#### **Strategy 3: Understanding the Context of Behavior**

According to Bateson (1972), all behavior makes sense in context. In the family systems therapeutic process, the therapist and the client(s) identify the interactional patterns that maintain dysfunctional or unsatisfying relationships and then explore new interactional patterns that produce a more satisfying family life. Anderson (1997) referred to the *not knowing* approach, which espouses that clients are more knowledgeable about their problem situations than is the therapist. Thus, *in language*, the therapist and the client(s) collaboratively construct meaning about the clients' experiences. The Milan group in particular applied a strategy called circular questioning (Selvini-Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin, & Prata, 1980) in which members of a system (family) were invited to describe the relationships of others in the system, thereby providing deeper and richer depictions of the system and honoring the perspectives of each member. The Milan group (circa 1980) found these strategies of circular questions to be particularly effective when a member of the family was asked to:



1. describe particular interactional patterns in certain circumstances;
2. describe specific differences in the behaviors of others;
3. rank behaviors or interactional patterns of others;
4. describe relationships before and after certain events; and
5. describe differences in terms of hypothetical situations.

Tomm (1984) provided detailed descriptions of how the Milan group worked with clients including the usefulness of the interviewing principle of circular questioning. Tomm (1987a, 1987b) also elaborated on the Milan group's model by discussing strategizing and reflexive questioning.

As a counselor researcher attends to the lived experiences and narratives of interviewees, all points of view are thought to be integral to the process of describing the participants' view of their own understanding of these experiences—or what is commonly referred to as co-constructing knowledge (cf. Holstein & Gubrium, 2004). Like the family therapist, the researcher does not presume to *know* what the interviewee is describing, but rather probes and elicits rich and thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of the participant's lived experiences. Listening for contextual clues about the experiences of the participant provides a *point of entry* into the lived experiences that are being explored in the research study.

#### **Strategy 4: Including Expanded or Larger Systems in the Interview**

Marriage and family therapists are skilled at involving other systems in therapeutic conversations even if no one from those systems is present (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008). These other systems might include extended family, teachers, day care workers, members of the juvenile justice system, social services, and others. Using Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2005) expanded ecological schema of nested systems that shape human growth and development, the therapeutic interview process also accesses systems that are relevant to the research study. Researchers might access the support of librarians, co-researchers, participants, transcribers, research assistants, institutional review board members, peer and professional consultants, representatives of funding institutions, and other stakeholders (e.g., from the larger systems such as schools, political entities, agencies). Figure 2 illustrates a nested therapeutic interview process as it pertains to Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2005) ecological theory. As seen in Figure 2, the therapeutic interview process is central to the immediate setting (i.e., Level 1) of the participant(s) in the qualitative research study. Level 2, communication and efforts on behalf of the research supportive networks (e.g., co-researchers, librarians, other stakeholders), extends from the immediate setting to other levels (i.e., Level 3 and Level 4). Thus, a spiraling effect results from the therapeutic interview process and results occur not only with the participant and researcher, but also with larger systems such as the community and culture. This idea of mapping Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2005) ecological theory onto the therapeutic interview process is consistent with Onwuegbuzie, Collins, and Frels' (2013) mapping of this systems theory onto the whole research process. According to Onwuegbuzie et al. (2013), virtually all qualitative research studies involve research conducted at one or more of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) four levels that they coined as *micro-research studies* (i.e., Level 1: research wherein one or more persons or groups are studied within his/her/their immediate environment[s]), *meso-research studies* (i.e., Level 2: research wherein one or more persons or groups are studied within other systems in which the he/she/they spends time), *exo-research studies* (i.e., Level 3: research wherein one or more persons or groups are studied within systems by which the he/she/they might be influenced but of which he/she/they is not directly a member), and *macro-research studies* (i.e., Level 4: research wherein one or more persons or groups are studied within the

larger cultural world or society surrounding him/her/they). Debriefing interviews can play an important role here by helping the counselor researcher to reflect on how to ask questions on different levels, and how to ask questions that deal with both content and process, as well as how to ask circular questions.

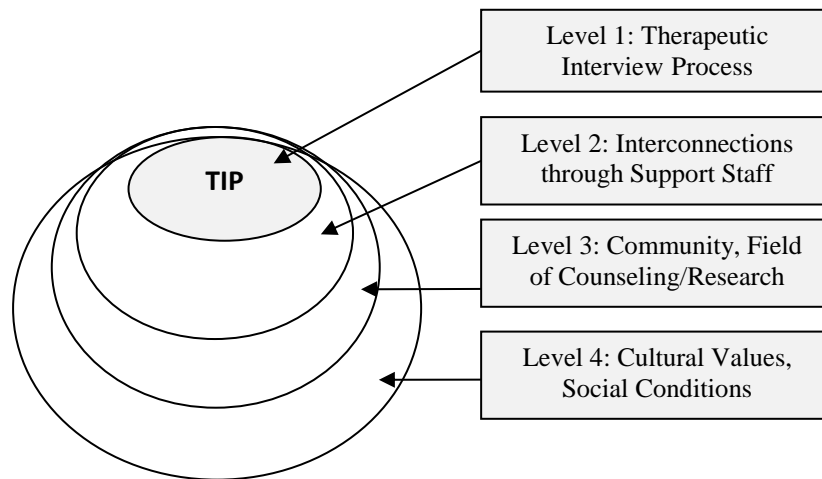


Figure 2. A nested therapeutic interview process based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory.

### Strategy 5: Maintaining Flexibility in the Conversation

Marriage and family therapists use conversational flexibility to increase the possibilities for positive outcomes in therapy. The term for this flexibility often is described as the therapist's ability to maneuver or to position her/him (Epstein, & Loos, 1989) to enhance the relationship with the clients and to create a space for change. During the therapeutic interview process in qualitative research, the counselor researcher creates a stance that can be bracketed (i.e., epoché; Gearing, 2004) so as not to interfere with the participant's narratives. Some authors (Van Manen, 1990) have referred to this as *situating* oneself in such a way as to acknowledge and to make transparent the researcher's previous beliefs, biases, and assumptions. In this way, the counselor researcher can give full credibility to each participant's narrative. Thus, in its most postmodern form, the interview is not merely a record of the participant's voice wherein the interviewer assumes the role of a completely passive observer, but rather a co-construction of knowledge (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2008) with the ultimate goal being to capture the participant's voice as completely and meaningfully as needed based on the research question and study design.

### Strategy 6: Attending to the Process of the Interview

In systems thinking and, as previously noted, there is more focus on the *process* of the communication in a therapy session than on the *content* of the communication. In other words, systems thinkers are much more interested in the relationship among elements than in the elements themselves (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008). Moustakas (1994) discussed several concepts similar to systemic thinking in his elements of a qualitative research model such as focusing on the wholeness of experience rather than on its parts, searching for meanings of experiences rather than for explanations, and obtaining descriptions of experiences through first-person narratives. We believe that the systems consisting of researchers, co-researchers, transcribers, research participants, methodologists,

dissertation/thesis committee members, transcribers, peer debriefers, and any other stakeholders can be viewed as interlocking systems in which the process of the qualitative research study may supersede the content or outcomes of the study. That is, the collective participants of the study who have contributed to the process of inquiry, an examination of a research question, and the ways in which they have participated can generate as much meaning as the actual data can generate. For this reason, we find it essential to report the process of a research study to the fullest extent possible. Indeed, this is a central tenet of debriefing interviews, which, as conceptualized by Onwuegbuzie et al. (2008), includes questions that extract information about the interview process itself as a necessary component.

### **Strategy 7: Taking a Restraining or *Go Slow* Approach**

The *go slow* or restraining approach is a paradoxical intervention used in strategic family therapy (Shoham, Rohrbaugh, & Patterson, 1995). The message to clients is that change takes time and must be accomplished in the proper sequence. Restraining is a way to prepare clients for change. Often, clients (paradoxically) want to *prove* the therapist wrong and make changes of their own accord. On the other hand, if clients are urged to hurry up and make changes, they may resist or give up. Like therapy, the therapeutic interview cannot possess a sense of urgency. Anderson and Goolishian (1988) explained that attempting to *understand fully* someone's experience too quickly can instead be a detriment to understanding. Similarly, as admonished by Tomm (1984), using circular questions too quickly can be difficult for interviewees because such practice can overwhelm them, stunting the collection of rich or even trustworthy interview data.

The *go slow* approach is particularly influential when considering the concept of prolonged engagement in research. In this respect, the counselor researcher should avoid conducting one-shot interviews. In fact, we recommend that a minimum of two interviews (of which one of the interviews can involve a follow-up interview to check part or all of the transcribed interview at the descriptive and/or interpretational level [i.e., member checking interview]) be conducted in every study because it is only by conducting at least two interviews that a counselor researcher can be confident that saturation has been reached—namely, data saturation, informational redundancy, and/or theoretical saturation (i.e., no new or relevant information appears to emerge pertaining to a category, and the category development is well established and validated; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, the strategy of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) contributes to the trusting bond formed in a close research relationship. Lincoln and Guba (1985) posited that member checking is an active process of determining if the descriptions of the observations and interviews are complete and realistic, the themes are accurate, and the interpretations are fair. Indeed, our call for conducting multiple interviews whenever possible is consistent with the recommendation of phenomenological researchers such as Seldman (2012). This notion of conducting multiple interviews is also consistent with Glaser and Strauss's (1967) concept of theoretical sampling within the grounded theory approach that is undertaken in an attempt to arrive at deeper understanding of previously analyzed (e.g., interviewed) participants; as well as Spradley's (1979) concept of ethnographic analysis, wherein domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, and componential analysis are used to obtain structural questions (i.e., domain analysis, taxonomic analysis) and/or contrast questions (i.e., componential analysis) that are asked in follow-up (structural) interviews. Moreover, the use of multiple interviews allows the counselor researcher to assess three levels of saturation: *within-interview saturation* (i.e., referring to the degree to which data from any single interview reached saturation), *across-interview saturation* (i.e., referring to the degree that saturation occurred across all the

interviews conducted on a single participant), *across-participant saturation* (i.e., referring to the degree that saturation occurred across all the interviews conducted on all the participants in an inquiry)—which, if evidence was obtained for all three levels of saturation, would yield *meta-saturation*.

### **Strategy 8: Using a Team Process Effectively**

In the field of marriage and family therapy, reflecting teams have been used to enhance the therapeutic experience of clients (Brownlee, Vis, & McKenna, 2009). Multiple perspectives are shared with the family in order to expand the possibilities for change. In the therapeutic interview process, counselor researchers enlist the assistance of colleagues, transcribers, experts in the field of study, mentors, and anyone else who contributes to the research experience as their reflecting team. The sharing of multiple perspectives helps counselor researchers “develop a meta-perspective of themselves” (Chenail, 1997, Paragraph 18) and to “build a meta-view on their own work” (Chenail, 1997, Paragraph 28). As interpretive interviewers reflect on their works during the debriefing interviews, these multiple perspectives are examined respective to the interviewer’s experiences and perceptions of the emerging themes. Important in the field of research is the concept of reflexivity and investigating researcher bias (Lather, 1991). Thus, the therapeutic researcher illuminates preconceived ideas regarding the research experience through systematized reflexivity. The team process is most helpful for promoting the goal of the researcher moving deeper into the investigation and capturing participants’ voices to a greater extent by identifying each researcher’s thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and experiences. As such, a research team should recognize the idea that an individual acquires knowledge through his or her interaction with social processes and contexts (Piaget, 1954). Kolb (1984) contended that learning is a continuous, holistic, and adaptive process wherein a person experiences a range of emotions, increased awareness, and innovative conceptualizations.

### **Strategy 9: Ending and Summarizing the Interview Process**

This strategy marks the exit point of the therapeutic interview process. In the therapeutic interview process, the pathway to this phase is via one or more debriefing interviews. However, as can be seen in Figure 1, the debriefing interview that directly precedes the exit point occurs between the interviewer (i.e., the counselor researcher) and the interviewee—as opposed to the debriefing interviews that occur between the debriefer and the interviewer, as is the case for the other eight strategies. In our therapeutic interview process, the interviewer-interviewee debriefing interview most likely would involve some form of (final) member checking interview. This member checking interview could serve several purposes. First and foremost, it could be used to confirm data’s trustworthiness and plausibility of one or more rounds of interviews and thus maximize descriptive validity (i.e., the factual accuracy of the participant interview responses as documented by the researcher; Maxwell, 1992). Or, at a deeper level, the member checking could be used to increase interpretive validity (i.e., the extent that a researcher’s interpretation of a participant’s account signifies an awareness of the perspective of the underlying group and the meanings linked to her or his words and actions; Maxwell, 1992) or even theoretical validity (i.e., the extent that a theoretical explanation developed from research findings fits the data, and thus, is credible, trustworthy, and confirmable; Maxwell, 1992). However, the most important function of interviewer-interviewee debriefing interviews is to promote therapeutic transformation via the advancement of ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and, most importantly, tactical authenticity. These interviewer-

interviewee debriefing interviews can be conducted face-to-face or non-face-to-face, which, in turn, could occur either synchronously (e.g., telephone, Skype, chatrooms, instant messaging, Second Life, mobile phone text) or asynchronously (e.g., email, websites, mobile phone text, reflexive journals).

## **Suggestions for Qualitative Researchers**

### **Legitimation of Qualitative Findings**

Researchers should be mindful that the purpose of an investigation must reflect structures to increase the credibility of the findings (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). These necessary structures include development of a relationship (rapport building and trust), opportunities for reflection (journaling), and a systemic approach (the research process encapsulating many entities). Another form of structure to increase the credibility of the findings is through triangulation. Denzin (1978) described multiple methods available to use to triangulate a research phenomenon (see also Johnson, 1997). These methods are multiple, data, methodological, investigator, and theoretical triangulation. The implications of this article suggest that multiple data triangulation methods are used by cross-checking and corroborating the information via the use of many procedures and sources outlined in this article.

### **Multicultural Implications**

There are considerations that researchers make when working with participants of a study. Considerations should be given in that strategies relevant to the inquiry process are cross-cultural and can suspend cultural barriers that might exist between researcher and participant. Examples such as joining and accommodating the participant, following the path of communication, facilitating the role of participants as co-researchers, taking a position of not knowing, including larger systems, situating oneself, and experiencing vicarious learning are evidence of strategies that remove cultural barriers and employ the type of co-participation necessary between researchers and their participants.

### **Implications for Teaching**

The therapeutic interview process has important implications not only for the teaching of qualitative research courses but also for the teaching of counseling courses. With respect to the former, instructors of qualitative research courses can teach the therapeutic interview process or some adaptation to students in many ways. For example, one lesson or more could be devoted to introduce students to each of the nine strategies. With regard to the latter, the therapeutic interview process could be used in select counseling courses to illustrate the important role that counseling in general and the family systems therapeutic process in particular play in fine-tuning interviewing skills for qualitative research studies.

As mentioned earlier, concerns of dual relationships, appropriate boundaries, and ethical dilemmas exist in qualitative interviewing. As such, it is incumbent on counselor educators to use caution when teaching the therapeutic interview process. For example, Bourdeau (2000) suggested utilizing a decision-making model in qualitative research much like counselors use when facing ethical dilemmas with their clients. In a study conducted by Dickson-Swift et al. (2006), the researchers interviewed qualitative researchers who described the problematic situations that arise in interviewing participants around sensitive topics. Their recommendations included having defined protocols for the following:

1. disclosure of who the researcher is and why this particular topic is being investigated;
2. building rapport with the participants;
3. making clear the difference between therapy and interviews;
4. implementing strategies for leaving the research relationship; and
5. managing professional boundaries.

All of the above processes would be appropriate to incorporate into teaching research methods and qualitative studies in which students are already learning about ethics in research. Clarke (2006) discusses the importance of researchers being open and honest about research inquiries and their willingness to have their studies scrutinized by others. Teaching counseling students about the importance of the internal review process is essential. These are all important considerations for the counselor educator who teaches research courses, chairs of dissertation committee, or partners with students on research teams. Counselor educators also could teach students how to conduct a debriefing interview. Works such as Chenail (2011), Onwuegbuzie et al. (2008), and Frels and Onwuegbuzie (2012) provide useful starting points for teaching this concept.

### Conclusion

More than a decade ago, Chenail (1997) thoughtfully declared the following:

Interviewing has become a widely used means for data generation in qualitative research. It is also a popular approach for counselors and therapists in their qualitative research projects. A major reason qualitative research-style interviewing is a favored technique with researching clinicians is that it is so similar to the way in which counselors and therapists interact with their clients in therapy sessions. Given this closeness in form, it would make sense that some of the ways therapists are taught to interview could be adapted to help beginning qualitative researchers learn interviewing skills as well. (Abstract)

Despite this declaration, although some of the techniques that counselors use in their day-to-day therapy sessions have been utilized to help train interviewers in qualitative research (e.g., Chenail, 1997), to date, this work has not yet cohered into a comprehensive framework or set of ideal counseling techniques.

With this in mind, the purpose of this article was to describe the systemic strategies relevant to qualitative research, via what we call the therapeutic interview process, that expand the meaning of a research study for both the counselor researcher and the participant(s). Specifically, we described how a therapeutic interview process, similar to family systems therapy, and which had the transformative conception of interviewing as its foundation—specifically, a two-way interactive transformative-emancipatory approach—can expand the meaning of a research study and create unexpected change in each person involved. In so doing, our framework is unique in at least three ways. First, by delineating the *process* of the interview as a primary consideration in qualitative research, we recognize the role of the therapeutic researcher as an extension of *counselor as person* and the importance of the interview of the counselor as person (and interpretive researcher) to minimize the effects of representation, legitimation, and praxis. Second, by outlining the therapeutic interview process via a modification of Charlés' (2007) strategies found in death notification and hostage negotiation, respectively (i.e., establishing and maintaining a relationship with

the client, matching the language of the interviewee, understanding the context of interviewee's experiences, including expanded or larger systems in the interview, maintaining flexibility in conversation, attending to the process of the interview, using *go slow* approach, using a team process effectively, and ending and summarizing the interview process), we maintain that the central core of the interview process is the therapeutic conversation itself and that this process optimally results in a trusting bond between the researcher and participant(s). Finally, through the mapping of the therapeutic interview process within the expanded systems outlined by Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2008) and Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005), we recognize that the therapeutic interview involves the systemic whole and that the outcomes of the therapeutic interview are far reaching for researchers from the field of counseling and beyond. Thus, we believe that family systemic thinking is both relevant and crucial in our approach to qualitative interviews to create a deeper meaning for all members involved.

As seen in Figure 1, each of the nine strategies underlying the (two-way interactive transformative-emancipatory) therapeutic interview process can be used to different degrees, depending on the research question(s) (e.g., number of research questions, complexity of the research question[s]) and study design, and the characteristics of the participant (e.g., how much time the participant has to be interviewed, the participant's knowledge of, or exposure to, the construct of interest). Indeed, because the degree that each strategy is utilized in the interview process lies on a continuum, the nine strategies can be combined in an almost unlimited number of ways, such that each participant has a unique (therapeutic interview process) profile. Thus, utilizing the therapeutic interview process clearly represents a systems approach wherein the researcher and participant(s) work together for systemic change. Simply put, we contend that utilizing the therapeutic interview process yields therapeutic interview systems thinking. We will leave the last word to Poggenpoel and Myburgh (2003):

Central to conducting research and more specifically qualitative research is the researcher as research instrument (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 368; Marshall & Rossman, 1995, pp. 59-65). The researcher is the key person in obtaining data from respondents. It is through the researcher's facilitative interaction that a context is created where respondents share rich data regarding their experiences and life world. It is the researcher that facilitates the flow of communication, who identifies cues and it is the researcher that sets respondents at ease. This also contributes to a therapeutic effect for the respondents because they are listened to. (p. 418)

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### **Article Citation**

Nelson, J. A., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Wines, L. A., & Frels, R. K. (2013). The therapeutic interview process in qualitative research studies. *The Qualitative Report*, 18(79), 1-17. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR18/nelson79.pdf>

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