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# Demonstrating Collegiality: A Co-Constructed Narrative Inquiry

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Demonstrating Collegiality: A Co-Constructed Narrative Inquiry

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University of South Florida

### Abstract

“Demonstrating Collegiality: A Co-Constructed Narrative Inquiry” seeks to define a collegial relationship through the experiences of two first year doctoral students at a large state-supported university. The techniques used to develop the co-constructed narrative parallel the authors’ development of a collaborative relationship. Using autoethnographic essays and interactive interviews, the authors co-construct several narratives that describe the process of moving from a friendly, social relationship to a scholarly, collaborative relationship, as well as the process of moving from peer reviewers to co-authors. An introductory narrative frames the paper; each of the “interior” narratives is accompanied by an extensive analytic introduction and the interpretation section is presented as a co-constructed narrative of the interpretive process. The authors attempt to categorize shared characteristics and values that were important to their development of a collegial relationship.

132 words

When I was a grad student, I got so much more from the two students I studied with –  
way more than in any of my classes.

Carolyn Ellis, Personal Communication

### Section 1: Literature Review and Planning the Project

#### Carolyn's Office

Books. An eruption of books. Books leaned jauntily against each other, their arms thrust deep into pockets at their sides. Books called to each other, nudged each other, bent over each other to tie their shoes. Carolyn's office was a cacophony of books.

“Just move that stuff off the chairs,” Carolyn motioned with one hand toward the books and papers stacked crazily on the black hassock in the center of the room. She used the other hand to point and click her mouse toward the open computer screen, pausing for a moment to impatiently brush wispy golden bangs away from her eyes. “Lemme just finish my email; I'll be right with you.” Carolyn's office was so much like her – adorned with the remnants of a rich, fabric-store life. Photographs were tacked at odd angles on a large corkboard; plants clambered over each other in their quest for light. Sunny and inviting, Carolyn's office reflected her soul.

“There, that's it.” Carolyn smiled with approval, and turned her chair to face the two of us. “What can I do for ya'll?”

“We were hoping we could talk to you about our proposed narrative co-construction project,” Elizabeth began.

“Tell me again what you wanted to do,” asked Carolyn.

Elizabeth settled into her chair and began. “We want to learn to use the co-constructed approach, and we'll do that by looking at the ways graduate students become professional

colleagues. You know, we've taken your course in Qualitative Methods, and Art Bochner's course in Narrative Inquiry, and we'd like to co-construct a story..."

"Or stories," interrupted Deb.

Elizabeth obliged with a nod and a flick of her pen, "Or stories... about the process of going from students to colleagues. We're really interested in this whole co-constructed idea. We've read a lot of theory about it, and now we'd like to try it out for ourselves. We were thinking that we would group our graduate school interactions together, write stories about them, come back together and analyze them, and then co-construct a final, narrative piece."

Deb jumped in. "We'd record our analysis, and, as Richardson suggests, use our "writing as a method of inquiry" (2000). We also want to use the paper that you, Christine Kiesinger and Lisa Tillmann-Healy did on "Interactive Interviewing" (1997). You all stated that you "view interviewing as a collaborative communication process occurring between researchers and respondents...[a] sharing of personal and social experiences..." (307). We'd like to capitalize on that work, as well as the two pieces you and Art Bochner did – "Telling and Performing Personal Stories" (1992) and "Which Way to Turn? (1999)."

"O.K. So you're doing an un-mediated, co-construction," observed Carolyn.

"You might want to look at Holstein and Gubrium's research on interviewing (1997). What are you discovering in the literature about peer mentoring?" Carolyn asked.

"Oh, there's a lot on peer mentoring, but most of it is about mentoring in the business or corporate world<sup>1</sup> or about mentoring in education<sup>2</sup> - you know, student teaching interns, at risk youth, that type of thing," began Deb. "Jarmin (1993) and Morgan (1999) have analyzed the use of mentors for beginning schoolteachers. Laabs (1994) used case studies to demonstrate the

benefits of mentorships for disadvantaged teenagers, while Arthur (1997), Collins (1994), and Jacoby (1989) have all focused on the career outcome benefits associated with being mentored."

"The work on mentoring in academia seems to address very hierarchical relationships<sup>3</sup>," added Elizabeth. "Dondero (1997) defines a mentor as "any caring mature person who forms a one on one relationship with someone in need" (881). That's not really what we're exploring. We want to write a story that demonstrates, as well as explains, the development of collegiality. Many of the studies done on graduate students reflect this power relationship. Heinrich (1995) observes that relationships between female doctoral students and their advisors were often characterized by 'silent betrayal'. 'Power was a key issue' (449) in these professional friendships. We prefer C. Bell's (2000) definition – 'a mentor is someone who helps someone else learn something that he or she would have learned less well, more slowly, or not at all if left alone' (52). He observes that his definition is 'power free...mentors are not power figures; they are learning coaches' (53). We don't want to study how professors mentor their graduate students<sup>4</sup>; we want to work on collegiality among graduate students."

"We've also searched under collegiality and collaboration," interjected Deb. "We've got some narratives<sup>5</sup> and lots of quantitative articles that measure how graduate students socialize<sup>6</sup> or handle stress<sup>7</sup>, but nothing specifically on how graduate students become mentoring colleagues. We may be trail blazing here. We want to use the techniques of co-constructing a narrative because it is a uniquely collaborative tool."

"Have you searched under 'friendship'?" asked Carolyn.

Deb and Elizabeth exchanged another look. "No," admitted Deb sheepishly. "I never thought of it."

"You might want to search that. It'll probably be worth it."

Deb and Elizabeth wrote furiously. “Anything out of Composing Ethnography (1996) or Reflexivity and Voice (1997) will probably be good too,” continued Carolyn, flipping through references in an article on her desk.

“So, will you sponsor us in this directed research, then, Carolyn?”

“OK,” replied Carolyn. “I’ve become intrigued by your work on collegiality. I found myself trying to think about when I was a student. I don’t remember reading papers with other students. Of course it was a different time, but I think we were more prone to work individually. If someone had suggested sharing papers, it might have almost seemed like cheating. It wasn’t a culture of cooperation back then.”

"I like that phrase, 'a culture of cooperation'," Elizabeth mused.

"Carolyn, you really didn't use your peers to review your papers?" Deb asked.

"No -- though when I was doing my dissertation we used to talk with each other about what we had done, what we had to do and generally what we were doing. When I studied for comps, I was in a study group. I got so much more from the two students I studied with – way more than in any of my classes. I don't know why we didn't continue that when we were doing papers. They just seemed so, well, different from each other, I guess. Let me just ask you both one more question. How will you handle it if one of you says something in your writing that makes the other feel bad or hurts the other’s feelings?"

“Well, we’ve already gotten past that, I think,” replied Elizabeth. “We read and criticize each other’s work all the time, and we tend to be sensitive to that vulnerability. Also, we’ve spent the whole year talking about classes and professors, and we’ve dealt with that pretty well.”

"Don't worry, Carolyn, we know the rule - 'Do no harm'," interjected Deb.

“OK, good,” Carolyn leaned back in her chair. “It is so interesting to watch you work together. I’ve noticed that you give each other the spotlight, acknowledge each other’s contributions, and weave together your ideas. It is a real pleasure to see how you honor each other as you work together. How do you think you’ll begin?”

“Maybe we’ll start with orientation,” suggested Elizabeth. “We can explore how we became friends. Then we can look at how that friendship became collaborative. Hey, maybe we should interview other graduate students, too. It would be interesting to see if their experiences were similar to ours.”

“Great idea,” Deb agreed. She and Elizabeth chuckled as they remembered their first days in the university’s doctoral program.

## Section 2: Graduate School Orientation-Disorientation

### Introduction and Methodology

We began the data collection of the project by individually writing autoethnographies about our orientation week of graduate school. This was an attempt to set the scene for our exploration of the collegial relationship that evolved. We agreed on the orientation week time period and an open-ended format, but we did not discuss the subject or format in depth. Our goal was to see what emerged as meaningful to each of us. Our questions were, “How did we feel about ourselves? How did we see each other? Why did our relationship develop?” We exchanged our orientation papers and shared our reactions during a meeting that we tape recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. We coded our data by theme.

The process was perhaps more intimate than we anticipated. During our conversation we were uncertain about the approach. We were unsure of the appropriateness in concentrating on ourselves or on our reaction to the other person. Overall the papers were about our own sense of



uncertainty and self-worth during the orientation. We shared a sense of disorientation with our surroundings at home and the university. Yet we both saw the other as highly competent, and we both offered assistance to each other in some way. We both remembered our initial conversation about our shared city of origin, our age and a ready sense of laughter. Our connections were rooted in both our similarities and our differences, or our perceptions of similarities and differences.

We did not co-construct the section about orientation week for this paper until after other parts of the project were written and analyzed. However, we decided to interview other students to get the sense of how these students felt during orientation and the first year of graduate school. We interviewed two male students and two female students. In at least one case the interview was taped and transcribed. Other interviews were not taped, but field notes were compiled. We reviewed these notes and transcripts during a meeting that we taped and transcribed. We identified common themes of uncertainty and insecurity.

We decided that one of us would use the orientation narratives and interviews to write this section of the paper on orientation-disorientation. Since these various sources of data were used, one of us chose to use third person. One of us chose to use first person in Section 3 and to edit stories into alternating viewpoints. Both of us agreed that the use of different approaches of co-construction would enhance the paper and the learning process. In both cases the editing process and review of each other's work challenged us to be open to this emergent work.

### I Don't Fit In

People sat stiffly around the large, rectangular, shiny oak conference table, many of them eying it with dislike and distrust. Shyly, the mixed group of men and women, all ages, began to introduce themselves to each other – feeling out the people with whom they would spend the

next four to seven years, the length of the University's doctoral program in communication.

“You’re from South Florida, too?” a woman with short blonde hair asked the tanned, athletic looking woman sitting next to her. Both were in their mid-forties, and they gratefully turned to each other and began chatting.

“Boca. I’m Deb,” was the reply. The sun hadn’t just darkened her skin; it had also lightened her casually cut, shoulder length hair. “Where in South Florida are you from?” Deb spoke loudly and quickly, smiling generously.

“I’m from Boca too! I’m Elizabeth. I worked at a library consortium down there.” Efficiency infused everything about Elizabeth – from her precise pronunciation to her economical hand gestures. The two women immediately connected – they were quickly sharing hearty laughs.

“Shit! I haven’t even unpacked, and I couldn’t make coffee this morning! I really need my coffee!” asserted Deb. Elizabeth made a mental note to find her portable traveling coffee pot to loan to Deb.

“I forget that we’re all going through the same thing,” Elizabeth said. “I just bought a house from hell, and I can’t unpack my boxes because the carpet’s flooded.”

“You know, my boyfriend does air conditioning, electrical, plumbing, all kinds of handy things. We could come over and help you,” offered Deb.

“That’s so nice of you!” exclaimed Elizabeth. “I’ve been whining about packing up and moving across South Florida. Could you imagine doing it all the way across the country?” Elizabeth nodded toward two young women across the table. Both seemed to be in their early twenties; both had brown hair. The two, Betsy and Kathy, talked quietly between themselves.

“I felt horrific being late,” lamented Betsy, fingering the green label on her folder.

“I didn’t notice you being late. Were you? There are people who aren’t even here yet!”

Kathy looked pointedly at the colored file folders in front of empty chairs. Why did people have different colors? Were the Ph.D. students and the Master’s students coded differently? Were they going to announce what the different colors meant?

“I sat near you because I figured we were closer to the same age,” murmured Betsy to Kathy after she introduced herself to the group.

Kathy replied, “You sure seem to have lots of job experience for someone our age. I don’t feel like I have any real world experience.”

“Not really!” laughed Betsy. “I don’t have experience; I don’t have much to offer.”

They both thought to themselves, ‘I don’t fit in’.

Ken’s thoughts echoed Betsy’s and Kathy’s. He’d had a class with Adam, and he casually knew a few other people, but as he looked around the conference room table he couldn’t help but think to himself, ‘I am in the wrong place. This is where the smart people are.’ He hurried through his self-introduction, chuckling nervously.

“I feel odd about my language,” Adam whispered to Ken when they had each finished their introductions. He ran a hand through his dark, tousled hair. “I mean, English is like a second, no, really, a third language for me. I hope people can understand me all right. I’m glad I already know so many people. T’was a good idea taking classes over the summer.”

“Yeah, who wants to admit they feel stupid during their first week of graduate school?”

Ken laughed quietly as the introductions continued to circle the long narrow table. The meeting facilitator called for a break, and the nervous students rushed to the shiny tile restrooms.

In the women's room, the conversation continued. “I feel odd because I’m an interdisciplinary student,” Elizabeth mentioned. “Everyone seems to be from communication.”

“I feel odd because I’m un-pressed,” Deb laughed as they hurried through their hair brushing and hand washing. “My iron must be packed in the same box as my coffee pot!”

“I feel odd because I’m often perceived to be so much younger than I am,” confided Betsy. “You all seem so much older than me, and the ones who do seem my age are men. I’d like to make friends with some of them, but they might think I’m hitting on them.”

“I feel odd because I don’t know what I want to study,” Kathy commented, joining Elizabeth, Deb and Betsy as they walked together back to the orientation room. They sat together as Sam introduced himself. He talked about his ethnographic study, his publications, his travels, and the different languages he spoke. “Oh my!” exclaimed Kathy quietly under her breath. She leaned over to Betsy and whispered, “Everyone seems so focused! Everyone seems to have publications!”

Later in the week, the students gathered in the backyard of the Director of Graduate Studies. They were at the culminating event of orientation week – a potluck dinner. Graduate students and professors pawed their way through coolers of beer, swatting at mosquitoes and smoking cigarettes while they tried to make polite conversation with each other. Water splashed as the kids jumped in the pool; fat raindrops fell occasionally from fat August thunderclouds.

“Everyone seems to have publications,” Kathy echoed her earlier comment. She tilted her head back to take a long swig from her beer. Deb tossed back a shot of Jack Daniels and nodded at Elizabeth, who threaded her way toward them through the knots of people on the lawn.

“How about you?” Deb asked as Elizabeth joined the small group of graduate students standing near the beer cooler. “You nervous?”

“Well, I wasn’t too nervous about the party because in my job I’m used to making small

talk with strangers. Small talk - what a terrible thing to call it! But this environment seems more judgmental in some way..." Elizabeth's voice trailed off.

"It's not small talk, though," interjected Kathy. "I can do that. These are all academic conversations. Professors are talking about academic things with their students. It's a little intimidating." Her boyfriend, Bernie, whispered something in her ear. "These parties make me really nervous," she finished. She and Bernie turned and walked inside the house, stopping to chat briefly with Betsy on the way in.

"Hi! Glad you made it!" Deb waved Betsy over. "I didn't think you were coming."

"Yeah, I really didn't want to come," Betsy smiled and pushed her bangs away from her brows. "I only came because my advisor gave me a ride. She really encouraged me. I'm just very tired," Betsy's voice faltered. "I've just moved to a brand new city where I don't know anyone. I think all this formalness, politeness – it's hard to have conversations with people you don't know. Plus I want to unpack."

"Yeah, but at least we're all in the same boat," laughed Elizabeth. "I've been talking to people about moving and packing all night! We've all been uprooted, and that's seems important! Hey, you about ready to go, Deb? I'm following you to the interstate, right?"

"Right!" Deb replied.

The road was poorly lit. The rainstorms had made the road slick and shiny. Every couple of seconds Deb would check her rearview mirror to ensure that Elizabeth's headlights were visible. Deb didn't realize it at the time, but she would soon learn that Elizabeth's headlights in her rearview mirror would be a comfort and a beacon throughout her first year of doctoral studies. In turn, Elizabeth learned that she would often be running to keep up with Deb at different times in different ways.

### Section 3: Critiquing and Collegiality

#### Introduction and Methodology

This section of the paper demonstrates the interactions that led to the development of the our collegial relationship. After we wrote our initial impressions of orientation and graduate school, we pursued the topic of developing a collegial relationship. In both Section 1 and Section 2 we looked reflexively at how we perceived both self and Other. From the start of the project we intended to research how the collegial relationships began and how a working relationship developed. We were particularly interested in the process of critiquing each other's work as a major aspect of collegiality. We used narrative inquiry to recall the inception of exchanging papers. We exchanged and discussed the resulting narratives. We taped and transcribed the formal discussion. We also engaged in informal conversations before and after classes or by phone. One of us subsequently developed the format for juxtaposing selections from the individual narratives. Only one of us wrote the final reflections; however, both of us edited for content.

We also agreed that we had developed a productive and supportive working relationship that enhanced our work. Throughout our first year, both of us had experienced very unsuccessful interactions with other students in the process of critiquing papers. In some cases the social interactions were positive, but the working interactions were unproductive. Sometimes these encounters lacked supportive quality, reciprocity, competence or even sense of timing. During the process of working on this paper we realized that we were unsure of the exact sequence of the first critique. It was unclear who was the initiator, who said what to whom. While discussing the narratives we discussed the importance of our focus on coming together rather than a hierarchy of who asked for help or offered help first. It was an invitational rather than

competitive style of communicating. Several other significant aspects of the process emerged in the narratives such as the effect of the classroom environment, students' combination of confidence and vulnerability, sense of personal responsibility, quest for continuous improvement, as well as the timing of interactions and the willingness to critique the works in discussion without relying solely on written comments.

### Sitting on the Stone Bench Together

#### **Deb**

The toilet flushed. "OK, it's just annoying." I continued talking to Elizabeth as I washed my hands and executed a quick hair repair in the mirror. "Participation is so difficult."

"How are you doing on your response papers?" Elizabeth asked.

"He hates them!" I groaned. "I specifically remember him saying to just mull over the readings, and then on my first paper he wrote that I had no thesis. I didn't know we had to have a thesis! I thought we were just supposed to jot down our thoughts about the readings."

"I had the same problem. I tried a creative approach that he really didn't like! He obviously wants more than just our feelings," observed Elizabeth. "Why don't we start exchanging our papers and doing a read for each other? We could even meet a day before class to go over the readings --if you want."

And so it began. We read each other's papers and exchanged suggestions. My writing started to improve. I even got positive feedback from the professor. Soon I didn't want to submit anything unless Elizabeth read it first. Her comments, questions and criticism made me feel more confident about my ideas and my writing.



**Elizabeth**

"So how is graduate school?" my sister asked during one of our heart-to-heart late night long distance phone calls.

"My first paper was a total bomb! It didn't even come close to being what the professor wanted. I'm disappointed, intimidated, and frustrated! He didn't really explain what he wanted. Luckily one of my classmates, Deb, said she would critique my next paper. She sits next to me in class."

"You just asked her for help?" My sister queried. "Someone you hardly know?"

"I can't remember how it actually started. It's no big deal; I need help. She has a masters in communication and seems to really know theory. Deb is very assertive and direct; it's easy for me to work with her."

"Of course, all your friends are strong and intelligent!" Peg teased me in our long-standing joke.

"Yeah, she's also got a good sense of humor - better than yours," I laughed.



**Elizabeth**

"I've done a good bit of facilitation and training, so I'm intrigued seeing how different professors handle different classes. I was so impressed when Carolyn used the first class assignment to promote interaction on that first night," I remarked to Deb. "Remember?" I thought back to our first class with Carolyn. She said, "During this class we will be learning about interviewing, observing, and interpreting. We are going to start by practicing on each other." She paired students and sent the pairs off to interview each other for ten minutes. "Your first assignment is to write a profile of your partner and be prepared to share the profile in class



next week. You decide on the format for your piece." As I listened to the presentations of the profiles I learned about the people who wrote the profiles, as well as the people who were being profiled. The writing style and content of each profile was unique. I felt that we were offered a glimpse of the strengths and talents of our classmates.

"This is more like the facilitation I'm accustomed to," I explained to Deb. "Throughout this class the professor created opportunities for students to consult with each other in small groups and share portions of their research. She structured it so skillfully. The professor also encouraged the whole class to share observations on this process. Our topics were highly personalized so we learned about the meaning of the projects in our lives. I felt a sense of collegiality emerging in this class. The discussions in class made it easier to approach each other outside of class."



**Deb**

"Were you happy with your grade in Carolyn's class?" Elizabeth asked diplomatically.

We both recognize that it can be uncomfortable to talk about grades. This question was a compromise; we could say yes, no, or share the grade.

"I got an A in the course; a B on my final paper."

"Are you happy with that?" Elizabeth sounded surprised.

"Yeah, her comments were right on. Sometimes I'm hardheaded. You told me to insert headings, she told me to insert headings. Did I insert headings? Hell no! I thought it would interrupt the flow of the narration."

Did Elizabeth say, "I told you so!" Of course not.

Instead Elizabeth said, "Want me to pencil in some suggestions for headings? I know you're working hard to submit this piece for publication."

Elizabeth always points out the positives and offers to help. She writes "wow" or "cool" or "this is really good" throughout the paper. Then she shares suggestions and criticisms. I don't feel stupid or intimidated when she reads my work. Elizabeth doesn't get offended if I tell her ways to improve her work. She never takes the criticism personally but sees it as a way to improve. It's a delicate balance. I'm glad we are both thick skinned at the right times.

Another reason why Elizabeth is my friend and colleague is because she never blames her performance on the professor. Like me, she looks within herself to identify weaknesses or errors. Many students are quick to blame the professor for their failings. I wonder if that is one reason we became colleagues, because we are aware of our own responsibilities. Maybe it is because we don't just want to be right, we sincerely want to find ways to improve and develop.



### **Deb and Elizabeth**

Deb and I had worked together for nine months, and we were grappling with our final projects in Art Bochner's Narrative Methodology seminar.

"Hey, do you want to grab lunch today?" Deb asked when I peek into her office.

"Yeah, great, I brought my lunch today - tuna as usual," I replied with a smile.

"Lemme' nuke mine, then let's go outside. I need a break from this shit," Deb said over her shoulder as she heads down the hall to the microwave.

"What were you working on?" I asked

"Oh, I have papers to grade and the project for tonight's class. But I'm about finished with my memoir. I'm real pleased with it. I'd like you to read it. See what you think." We hadn't planned to critique the memoirs, but the timing was right.

"You're ahead of me. All I have is a real rough draft, but let's work while we eat."

We wandered out under the trees and straddled a stone bench. It was small for two people juggling papers and lunch, but we made it work. Deb was considerate of my pale skin so she sat in the sun while I sat in the shade. We munched and read quietly. Then we discussed sections of our work. By now we could almost talk in shorthand. We could jump from topic to topic. It had become the easy casual language of friends.

I admired Deb's words and writing style. I was able to point out a few changes that clarified the point for the reader. But I started to have a minor "head-trip" - my work seemed too heavy and convoluted, maybe even boring. I forced myself to resist comparisons and reminded myself that we were different, not better or worse.

"Are you going to write five episodes?" Deb asked. "That seems like a lot."

"I don't know. I've roughed out the episodes, and they all fit together. I've only drafted a few parts so far. The first episode is close to done."

Deb circled a sentence in the middle of my first episode. "I think this should come first. It would be a hook to bring the reader into the piece. Lots of people can relate to the prettier sister."

"You are so right! I often tend to bury the key sentence. It's like I have to write the piece in order to find that perfect line. Thanks!" I think to myself that I admire Deb because she can cut to the chase. She is so focused. Her suggestion made the beginning of the memoir so much better.

"If you want me to be in your performance, I'll be glad to work with you," Deb offered.

#### Section 4: Analysis, Interpretation and Future Research

##### Introduction and Methodology

This section of the paper is an interpretation of the data collected for this project and an example of another co-construction technique. As described in previous section introductions we participated in interactive unmediated conversational interviews (Ellis, 1999; Jorgenson) about both the process and the data throughout the construction of the personal narratives, interviews and compilation of the other sections of the paper. We discussed the narratives formally and informally for six months. We each kept separate field notes. We wrote this section last as an effort to summarize our sense making.

We constructed this section of the paper differently than the other sections. Sections 1 and 5 were written by one of us individually after a discussion between both of us. Sections 2 and 3 were based on narratives written by both of us, but were compiled by one of us. When it was time to write Section 4 and interpret the data, we were unsure how to proceed. We met to discuss our findings and “capture” the emergent themes after we had discussed, coded, analyzed, and re-analyzed all of our stories, autoethnographies and interview transcriptions. We agreed to discuss the data, assess how we each perceived the results of the project, and then assign who should write what. However, during that conversation we decided to try another form of co-construction by sitting at the computer together and writing the interpretation together. We also realized that this interpretation section could be a narrative that represented our process of our discussion and analysis (although we want to stress that interpretation was an on-going process spanning several months). This is similar to the approach in other sections of the paper. We endeavored to show the reader, not just tell the readers about co-construction and collegiality.

We “talked through” the data so that the story that follows is an analysis of selective data gathered orally and in writing.

### Groovin' and All that Jazz

Deb and Elizabeth sipped their coffee. Elizabeth's kitchen table was big, bright and sunny - a perfect place for two colleagues to work. "I agree with you that now's the time to work on a section that analyzes and interprets all of our data." Deb flipped through the pages of her black and white composition book. "We need to make the emergent categories clear. I mean, we show them in the stories, but we need to really stress them. So first, let's compare our categories and the notes we've made during our co-constructions."

Both women began reading the lists they had made as they analyzed their data throughout the course of their project. They were surprised at how many qualities they had identified that seemed to foster a collegial relationship. "Commonalities seemed to be important," observed Elizabeth, peering over her reading glasses at her notes. "We first became friendly because we were demographically similar – we were from the same place, we were about the same age, we're both women. We've also written 'shared values' several different times. It's a question of values - looking at our values and other people's values. I think that's one of the main reasons that we developed a collegial relationship, we both value collaboration."

"Carolyn helped with this a lot," observed Deb. "We first 'peer-edited' in her class, and it seemed natural to continue the collaboration in other classes we took together. Carolyn made it easy to try something new."

"Absolutely! Her behavior is collegial, too. She models a collaborative approach as our professor. That would be an interesting topic for another paper, professors that do and professors that don't!"

"And it's all about encouragement," Deb added. "You and I stress the positives when we critique each other's work, just like Carolyn does. Instead of competing with 'the Other', we learned to value 'the Other'. When we critiqued each other's work, we were always careful to give each other positive encouragement as well as to make suggestions for improvement. Trust is critical. You know, I could always count on you for a couple of smiley faces!" laughed Deb.

"Yeah, when the review process is reciprocal, the mentoring relationship becomes more collegial," observed Elizabeth. "Hey, remember that jazz article we read about organizational learning? The Frank Barrett piece? (1998) He identified seven features necessary for jazz improvisation. Some of those seem to fit our interpretation..."

"Perfect!" Deb exclaimed. Her brow quickly furrowed. "But how can we insert our analysis into this narrative work?"

"In a story!" responded Elizabeth. "Right now! We'll write it together at the computer. It will add another level to the multi-layered techniques we've already been using."

"Sounds great. Let's experiment, and see what happens." Deb and Elizabeth each poured another cup of coffee and moved their work from the kitchen table to the office.

"What were Barrett's seven categories?" Deb asked as Elizabeth rummaged through her file cabinet.

"Here it is," Elizabeth snatched an article from a file in her drawer. She pulled up a chair next to where Deb was sitting in front of the computer. "The list he uses includes 'embracing errors', 'taking turns', 'hanging out', 'distributed task', 'retrospective sense making', 'provocative competence', and 'shared orientation'..."

“Toward minimal structures that allow maximum flexibility (606)!” Deb finished with a flourish as she finally found her copy of the Barrett piece.

Elizabeth began. "Provocative competence is really all about wanting to learn...taking risks. This whole project is a great example of that. Both of us have done that all year, which is one reason we became colleagues."

"And embracing errors is certainly what we're talking about here. What about 'shared orientation toward minimal structures that allow maximum flexibility'?"

“Well, you and I have also embodied flexibility. We worked that way all year. It's also the way we conceived this project...”

"Yeah, along with 'distributed task'," Deb interrupted. "We assigned ourselves different parts of the project, and yet we were really sensitive to its emergent nature. Barrett called it 'an empathic competence...a mutual orientation to one another's unfolding'" (613).

"Right," responded Elizabeth. "And you got to be the smart one sometimes, and I got to be the smart one sometimes." They both laughed. "As Barrett says, we took turns soloing, but we also supported each other. That's the real difference between competition and collegiality. There is no hierarchy. There is no top. We just get in a groove together. Our styles complimented each other's, but we had to be willing to accommodate our differences."

"Wow, this jazz metaphor really does fit!" exclaimed Deb. "We remained open to the way the project changed as we went along."

"Is that trust? Flexibility?" Elizabeth asked. "What is that?"

"Open-mindedness," said Deb.

"Respect for diverse opinions," added Elizabeth. "That really relates to 'reliance on retrospect sense making' (606). Again, our whole project was a process of looking at how we became colleagues, making sense of the collegial process."

"And interviewing others to see if they had the same 'sense making' that we did," answered Deb.

"And the same values," added Elizabeth. She paused. "So that takes us to hanging out together, becoming members 'in a community of practice' (Barrett, 606) at the university, in academia."

"Yeah, it's proximity."

"Don't forget panic and process," added Elizabeth. They both laughed. "Hanging out was a big part of not only becoming friends, but also becoming colleagues. We needed to take the time and make the time in order to exchange papers, talk to each other, to sit on the bench, so to speak."

"And even that's not enough," observed Deb. "There's a sense of vulnerability when sharing your work with others, but there also has to be a sense of confidence."

"O.K. So let's sum up," suggested Elizabeth. "We worked together for different reasons in different classes, but the seeds of our relationship were planted during orientation week. We discovered similarities and differences in our values and goals. Some of the classes and the environments created by professors provided fertile soil for collegial practices to grow."

"But the class environment was only one part of developing collegiality. The interpersonal interactions seem even more important," observed Deb.

"I see similarity to all this and the research from the Amherst Foundation (Mattessich & Monsey) on success factors for collaboration: favorable social climate, mutual trust, ability to



compromise, frequent communication and seeing collaboration as important to your self interest,” Elizabeth suggested (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992).

“Sounds similar. We can mention it, but let’s focus our conclusion with something from the friendship literature like Carolyn suggested,” Deb replied pensively.

“Let’s look at our notes. I think we decided that our best source was that book on friendship with women (Apter & Josselson,1998),” Elizabeth suggested. Both women rummaged through the sheets of paper that trailed from the kitchen table into Elizabeth's office.

“Here it is,” said Deb. “My notes say that friendships often start with admiration. That’s us, all right. Wait, the author also said that women and girls form strong relationships or friendships when they feel a common sense of vulnerability or anxiety (227). Yeah, that was definitely grad school disorientation.” They both laughed.

“There was a section where the book discussed midlife friendships as a way to counteract marginalization and cope with the self-doubt and stereotypes of middle age (279),” added Elizabeth. “I felt that somewhat, but I’m not sure it is critical.”

“That’ll be for our next paper,” Deb grinned, “OK, so let’s make our own list.” She began typing furiously.

Similarities

Sense of Humor  
 Common Ground  
 Positive Feedback  
 Risk-takers  
 Flexibility  
 Sense of Confidence  
 Proximity

Shared Values

Collaboration  
 Non-Hierarchical, non-competitive  
 Education  
 Embrace Errors  
 Open-mindedness  
 Mutual Trust  
 Process

“Some of these qualities seem more methodological, like “distributed task” and “reliance on retrospective sense making”, observed Elizabeth.

“Yeah, I like the way method and content seem to be integrating,” agreed Deb.

Elizabeth nodded as she flipped through papers. “Here’s a quote that sums up our friendship and move toward collegiality: ‘We discover new parts of ourselves with our friends, who see us in different ways, touch aspects of ourselves we didn’t realize existed...Our friends’ views give us new ways of knowing ourselves and our world’” (275).

Deb followed up, “Perfect! It describes the result of our co-construction as well as our year of working together. But you know some friends don’t really become colleagues. It could also be how we use the word or the different types of friendships. And so far we have only looked at women and friendships. There may be a larger gender issue here.”

“That’ll have to be for our next paper,” suggested Elizabeth. The two friends, collaborators, began reading over their work, exhausted, but satisfied.

#### Section 5: Final Reflections

In this section of the paper we reflect on our development of a collegial relationship and the importance of the methodology used in this project. Throughout the project we tried to define how we developed a sense of collegiality and what it meant to us. Our conversations with each other were essential components of developing collegiality. We also relied heavily on feedback and guidance from our professor, Carolyn Ellis, who inspired our approach, read our drafts and engaged in collegiality on another level. There were three aspects to this project: (1) the substance of the topic, collegiality; (2) the narrative method of collaborative inquiry; and (3) the co-constructed method of writing. The topic and method seemed to be a particularly well-suited combination. The project specifically focused on the co-construction process, which required intensive interaction and writing. The process of working in a close dyadic relationship

was critical to the research project. The product represents the structure of co-construction as well as the process.

The project centered primarily on our perceptions and interactions; however, several other students were interviewed for comparison. After individually writing personal narratives, we discussed the narratives extensively, transcribed the discussions and interpreted the results. This sequence was vital to compiling the final paper. An important aspect of collegiality involved timing and understanding the rhythm of each other's lives, as well as reciprocity of interests and interaction. Other students expressed a high level of interest in reading the drafts of the paper, and verbal feedback was positive.

Compiling and writing the final paper was much more difficult than we anticipated. We broadly outlined the sections for inquiry but each of us wrote from a different perspective. We saw similarities and differences in our stories. We worried if we wrote too much about our perceptions of ourselves or not enough about our perceptions of the Other. We discussed the format of the final paper in advance but realized that the individual narratives in each section would shape the final construction. Each of us assumed responsibility for synthesizing a section of the paper based on both of our narratives. After a year of critiquing each other's work we felt well prepared for the project but several aspects of this process were challenging: (1) "I don't think I'd say it that way." Our narratives often involved dialogue, and we had to achieve a comfort level with words ascribed to each other. The content might be accurate, but the language made a difference. (2) "You can be the smart one here." The interpretation and final edit was done jointly. At one point we actually sat at the computer together writing (Section 4). At times we could not remember who contributed an idea from our notes; it seemed more likely that the idea was co-produced. We did not concentrate on the ownership of the idea but rather on

portraying a truthful representation of the balance in our contributions. (3) "Can we find time to get together this week?" Co-construction took much more time than we anticipated. When there is joint ownership of the ideas, the words, the stories, and the structure of the paper it takes time to write, discuss, edit, discuss again and revise. Proximity was especially important to the success of the project. (4) "I thought that was an important point." This process required more than just giving each other feedback, which allows the writer to decide how or when to use the suggestions. We were actually editing each other's stories, interpreting our perceptions and our perceptions of our perceptions, trying to preserve our individual voices yet create a cohesive, unified paper. For us the process of exploring our memories, sharing those memories and discussing how we perceive each other was reasonably smooth. It added depth to our relationship. The process of writing together was more challenging than we anticipated, but we learned even more about ourselves and each other. This was the essence of our co-construction process.

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Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur, 1997; C. Bell, 2000; Bullis & Bach, 1989; Collins, 1997; Hagevik, 1998; Heery, 1994; Jacoby, 1989; Saltzman, 1996; Sam, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Dondero, 1997; Jarmin, 1993; Laabs, 1994; Morgan, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Collins, 1994; Ervin, 1995; Heinrich, 1995; Neumark, 1998; Olson & Ashton-Jones, 1992; Waldeck, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Garner, 1994; Schweizer, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> E. Bell, Golombisky & Singh, 2000; McKelly, 1990; Zencey, 1990.

<sup>6</sup> Bauer & Green, 1994; Myers, 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Hudson & O'Regan, 1994; Lawson & Fuehrer, 1989; Rocha-Singh, 1994.