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“Speaking the unspoken”. Negotiating the intricacies of ethics, power and our relationships together within a feminist participatory action research project with professional rural colleagues



Acknowledgements

- Rural communities and therapy families/clients (especially those involved in the 2009 Victorian bushfires)
- Peers, professional family therapy colleagues and students
- Fellow PhD students and supervisors

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Overview

- Why research rural family therapy ?
- What do I want to know/How do I want to know it ?
- Theoretical framework- focussing on developing an ethical framework for research with my focus group
- The story so far...issues of ethics and power

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Why research rural family therapy & therapists?

- Personal & professional interest:
- Rural family therapist, psychiatric nurse and lecturer
- Limited Literature

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What do I want to know?

- The (extra)ordinary experiences and practices of rural family therapists
- Wide variety of participants who are rural family therapists (RFT's) : nurses, social workers, teachers, community support workers, ...

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How do I want to know it ?

- Individual interviews
(Those who teach rural family therapy)
- Focus group and small group interviews
- Ethical approval via Te Whare Wananga o Waikato/
University of Waikato, Human Research Ethics
Committee

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Theoretical framework : Shaping research processes and practices

- Social constructionist research values difference and diversity , multiple realities, researchers as a 'polyvocal agent' (Gergen & Gergen, 2008)
- Feminist research calls attention to issues of power, gender and difference (Reid & Frisby, 2008; Grant, Nelson & Mitchell, 2008)
- PAR for benefit of participants not researchers (Reason & Bradbury, 2008)
- Narrative therapy: co-research (power)

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Approved Ethical Framework :

- Feminist PAR (emergent)
- Initial research meetings with co-researchers to develop own ethical framework
- Participants as co-researchers (Epston, 1999) in optional research processes, including data generation & analysis
- Researcher transparency and reflexivity

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Approved Ethical Framework and research plan: Feminist PAR (Emergent)

Research processes developed together with ongoing collaboration between co-researchers, myself, PhD supervisors and ethics committee (emergent design)

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Approved Ethical Framework: Initial Research Meetings

Develop our own ethical framework together for potential ethical issues, using relational ethics (Ellis, 2007) to guide me as practitioner-researcher

How to deal with ethical issues of difference/diversity, aims of research, ownership of data...

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Potential questions to guide co-researchers

EG :

"What are the differences of...
-family therapy practice and theory
-culture/gender/ethnicity
-other differences I have not known to ask about
...we bring to this research and how do we respond to
these differences in ways that are respectful and just ?"

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Focus group ethical framework (group rules)

That we, as focus group members have discussed and agree to the following statements which will guide us in being ethical, respectful and just in our interactions with each during our focus group meetings for this research project:

- "Differences are important and need to be captured"
- "Healthy debate is important"

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**Focus group ethical framework
(group rules)**

- "We will not always agree on everything. We are not always looking for solutions rather, we value exploring the differences together"
- "As a group we have worked together often and know each other well and we will call upon this history, of professional respect of each other in our work together for this research"

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**Focus group ethical framework
(group rules)**

"That we, as focus group members have an understanding that everyone has a right to a difference of opinion; everyone's perception of things is different and that is ok"...

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**Approved Research(er) strategies:
Transparency**

- Statement of personal and professional hope and intent in research invitations
- Theoretical framework and influences acknowledged and explained



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Where are we now ?

- Data generation from 1 focus group, 1 small group and individual interviews complete
- 14 co-researchers (participants) in total, across 3 states
- Written and visual analysis underway yet to be completed

The story so far...what might this tell us about rural family therapy practice?

In the context of acknowledging there are multiple versions of reality, no one version 'correct':

- Multiple realities of rural practice emerging
- Teaching and practice of rural family therapy is different from urban

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....And a last word on the feminist issue of Power

Issues remain despite collaborative research relationships with participants:

- Urban family therapists 'superior'?
- Researcher as 'expert' as organiser/facilitator
- Co-researchers asking: "What is research?"
(language and accessibility issues)
- Co-researchers no time for analysis

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