

## Multiple Lenses of Therapy Research: The paradox of bricolage

### Abstract

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### Full-Text

# Multiple Lenses of Therapy Research: The paradox of bricolage

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no SUMMARY?

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From the lofty gaze of university academics and the trials of the ethics committee; research into counselling and psychotherapy by therapists is definitely not a fundamental given. So for the therapists that do decide to take up the challenge, a long path is trodden, and a lot of learning, negotiating and change are undertaken. One of the main and fundamental decisions to any piece of research and researcher is the choice of methodology. A researcher will ask in relation to this: Where am I philosophically coming from? How am I going to do this piece of research? Where will I get my data, and how am I going to analyse it? Am I going to do numbers (quantitative), or am I going to do words (qualitative)? Or am I going to do both?

For the budding new researcher and experienced alike there are a number of 'off the shelf' methodologies to choose from: quantitative statistical analysis, case study, grounded theory, narrative, auto-ethnographic, heuristic, IPA, Feminist approaches, action-research to name a few (Sanders & Wilkins, 2010). These all have set criteria and structure dependent to each which makes the research fairly systematic and possible. This is of course a very over simplified evaluation of research, with the research generally being more 'messy' and unstructured as the methodologies would have us believe. Again the theory *per se* is a lot more organised and structured than the actual '*doing*' of the theory – not dissimilar to the therapy-world client/therapist relationship.

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Let me take therapy as my starting point. The client, in a vulnerable state, as Rogers (1957) claims, comes to therapy. Who is this person? What of their life? What makes this person who they are, and what has motivated them to take the step into the therapy-world? The therapist (the other), trained in a certain style, qualified, offering a space and time for the client to explore and understand their reasons for therapy with the possibility of change; the client looking for change. These are taken as givens in the therapy world (Norcross & Wampold, 2011). But then who is this therapist and this client in this therapy-world? The possible answers, I imagine, depend on your theoretical underpinning and the client's perception. However I'll try to pin it down to a general view: the therapist and client are the sum total of their life experiences, values, beliefs, philosophical stance, theoretical viewpoints and every possible relationship that person has had, is having and will continue to have throughout their life. As Gergen (2009) claims, 'The word "I" does not index an origin of action, but a relational achievement' (p. 133). Yet, even with Kenneth Gergen's bolstering, it still does not diminish the fact that my previous statement is *grand* and *sweeping*. Nevertheless I hope it does encompass and highlight the range and diversity of experiences that are involved in a person's creating of a self. Can a person live in isolation? I believe not. If we take the existential '*given of relatedness*' (Spinelli, 2015) and understand that from the very moment a person is conceived, they are in relationship i.e. with the mother; and when that person is born they are then thrust into a world of additional others (people), who influence that person's construction and shaping of their self. Yes we can be physically alone, but we are always in contextual thought.

### What has this got to do with bricolage and therapy research?

Taken from Levi-Strauss (1966) *The Savage Mind*, where he used a metaphor to describe and portray a person who is 'adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer ... [they do] ... not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project' (p. 17). The creator of the bricolage weaves a mixed tapestry of metaphor and meaning, incorporating their skills and ability to adapt and create *a new* with the resources available to them, as Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p.4) have posed the image of the researcher as 'quilt maker'. The person to perform this bricolage is known as *the bricoleur*. Kincheloe (2004) goes to the original French meaning as 'a handyman or handywoman who makes use of the tools available to complete a task.' (p.1). Within this concept one can see the versatility and flexibility the bricoleur has to apply a variety of methods and viewpoints to a research task to assist in design, exploration and completion. The bricoleur is also not restrained or constrained by strict prescribed methodological criteria, as the bricoleur understands that knowledge is a human construction in all areas of research, and

is open to interpretation; even quantitative empirically produced knowledge is not free from human involvement and perspective (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). Ask an accountant what two plus two is, and they may reply, what do you want it to be? Therefore coming from a place of multi-layered and contextual positioning in the world, where the postmodern is experienced as a place of continual change, consisting of multi-viewpoints as opposed to mono-viewpoints; the bricolage offers a philosophical stance founded in difference and diversity.

The client therefore comes to therapy as a multi-layered and diverse human being, so does the therapist. Yes, both can be fixed and inflexible in their beliefs and values with a rigid sense of self, but to deny that the person has not been shaped by the other and their experiences of life is to deny the fundamental *'given of relatedness'*. Is not each of us a unique and contextual being with a life story to tell? And if this is the case, why would I try and make that client fit within criteria that perhaps does not value or allow that uniqueness to shine? If you are open to the client, why not then be open to the research participant?

Ok, yes, I agree that the methodological choice of the therapy researcher, the majority of the time, is chosen by what fits for them. Obviously incorporating their philosophical stance and how they view their world or the world. But how does this take into account the participants' and their world? Qualitative researchers (especially narrative and heuristic) are probably screaming at me by now, shouting at the top of their lungs, 'But we do this already!' Even some quantitative researchers are probably rolling their eyes, saying, 'isn't this what research does anyway?' Yes may be so, but this is not my point. My point is moving into the realms of a postmodern world, whereby the individual is no longer viewed as a unified self. The postmodern person is made up of many aspects of self, each contextually driven and positioned in an ever changing world of multi-layered relationships (the internet and advancing technology is testament to that). So if this is the case, why are people still being reduced and categorised to fit with prescriptive methods of evaluation and analysis? Why are researchers still sticking to 'off the shelf' methodologies? Yes, they are tried and tested; they work and do the job, but are they still relevant? Are they able to fully analyse and present the postmodern person in all their glorious technicolour?

Now this is where I slightly fall down, although I imagine some readers are convinced I have already. What I'm proposing is a paradox within itself. Can the bricolage therefore be a methodology in its own right with set criteria, given the previous definitions? And if so, is this not completely undermining my whole argument? Yes and yes to both questions. Yes the bricolage can be a methodology in its own right by the very fact that it exists and is used. Yes I'm countering my argument in relation to the *already* established understanding of bricolage. However, what I'm asking is for the UK research community to re-evaluate the

bricolage, and to allow researchers to explicitly approach research as a bricolage methodological enquiry *per se*, allowing for a multi-textured analysis and presentation. Therefore the bricoleur can approach the participant as a unique person constituted within their social, political, historical and personal contexts. This also can take into account the socio-political power structures and how these exclude/marginalise some groups' realities and privilege more dominant groups, imposing and reinforcing hegemony (Kincheloe, McLaren & Steinberg, 2011), which once again is looking to highlight discrimination and create awareness to prejudice within our societal infrastructures. There are qualitative approaches to research that do this already (e.g. narrative, critical theory, Feminist, action research), but the difference is in the set criteria that the methodologies hold in relation to the researchers. Like any group, if you want to be in our gang you have to abide by our rules. You have to be one of us to be one of us. This is all well and good if you fit into or are able to adopt the group's rules, but what if you don't, what if you want to be accepted for an individual in your own right. What if you have diverse values and beliefs that cross-over, contradict, or hang in tension between methodologies and theories? Where does this leave you?

In the therapy-world we have integrative and pluralistic theories which allow possible diversity in the therapist. Where is this in the research community? Why are we still behind? I guess the answer to this lies in scientific evidence based practice and sadly what research currency is of most value to government based policy holders i.e. numbers and stats. And also in academic and philosophical circles that choose to demarcate themselves by their own groupings and set criteria. However this does not mean that the bricolage cannot and should not incorporate these diverse theoretical, political and philosophical stances – if held by the researcher and are applicable – into the research design and question. What I'm proposing is openness to diversity by looking at the holistic picture and not trying to reduce the person to fit within a category or be analysed by a certain set of methodological conditions. I'm suggesting that research potentially highlights and embraces the harmonies, tensions and contradictions of the postmodern person in all their complexities. Does not the ethical therapist strive to be open to *all* of the client, not wanting to discriminate due to methodological/theoretical criteria? One would hope.

This non-discrimination is then also offered to the bricoleur researcher as well, allowing for a possible openness and fluidity to the tensions and harmonies that exist within the researcher. But what of reflexivity, you ask? Does not reflexivity cover this in research? To a point, yes; the researcher will take a reflexive stance toward self and openly present their values, beliefs and viewpoints in the research, but the difference with the bricolage is the explicit possibility to analyse and present the data from the different perspectives that exist within the

researcher, without them being restricted or contained by set methodological criteria. Now don't get me wrong. I'm not advocating an *'anything goes'* policy with no rigour or trustworthiness. What I'm stating and advocating is a rigorous and transparently presented piece of research and analysis that allows for multiple perspectives and differences to be acknowledged and incorporated into the final report/presentation that potentially crosses-over methodologies. The researcher therefore is allowed to be an individual, without feeling they have to compromise certain aspects of self or *'fit'* into a certain research group's criteria, to be allowed to do research.

### Conclusion

I hope in some way I have emphasised the possible gap and need to re-evaluate the bricolage in relation to the advancing and ever-changing social world. Human science is the need to know, create and discover the complexities and wonders of the human *being* and the social and cultural worlds we create. Diversity and difference is again ever present and changing, we engage in different languages, share and experience varying degrees of beliefs and values, and then play these out in relation to our social contexts and the people we engage with in our lives. The human *being* and the human *world* is a multi-layered complexity of relationships, uniquely coloured, beautiful and yet at times terrifying. Human *being* and human *life* therefore exists *as* a bricolage.

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