



RESEARCH METHODS

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IF RESEARCH WERE SACRED—AN ORGANIC METHODOLOGY

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The following is excerpted from *If Research Were Sacred—An Organic Methodology*. Available from the **Serpentina Bookstore**.

To the Reader

At a recent dinner party, a young woman was overheard to say that she was just beginning her doctoral dissertation in the social sciences. She bemoaned the fact that she could find no legitimate research method that did not limit her ability to explore the deeply personal topic she had chosen. She felt that the linear constraints and rational expectations of traditional methods would stifle her ability to engage with the spiritual and intimate nature of the subject she had chosen. She would need to change her topic to fit the available methods.

This book is directed to you who share this young woman's dilemma. It introduces a new and evolving qualitative research methodology called organic inquiry which stands at the intersection of feminine spirituality and transpersonal psychology and follows the lead of innovators like Carol Gilligan and Clark Moustakas who have prized open the weighty doors of research. We see a need to continue to swing them even wider so that previously unstudied realms of human experience may be explored.

Organic inquiry is a qualitative methodology which acknowledges that every research study has an inherent and expanding nature which may be realized through subjective and intuitive methods. Rather than aiming at generalized and replicable results, organic inquiry seeks to present the data and analysis in such a way that the individual reader may interact with it and be personally transformed.

The methodology views the researcher's own experience and story as the instrument of the study. Just as a qualitative instrument measures data, the story and the ongoing experience of the primary researcher becomes the tool of measurement of organic data and the means by which the

reader may engage with the results.

Where most qualitative research insists that the researcher identify and bracket her or his assumptions and presuppositions to achieve a state of that is free of personal judgment, organic inquiry depends on the researcher's ability to hold her or his personal experience, both of the topic and of the progress of the research itself, in the foreground as the data are gathered and analyzed and to consciously use it as the vehicle for analysis of the data.

Feeling, intuitive, creative and thinking modes are all essential tools in evaluating data as well as in expressing the results. These four styles of investigation, each a valued aspect of organic inquiry, honor not only linear and rational approaches but also subjective and holistic ones. Using personal stories allows the researcher to use all four of these methods in order to inform the reader on an experiential as well as an intellectual level. This widens the opportunity for individual transformation that is seen as the goal of organic inquiry.

Organic inquiry does not seek to inform the reader by generalizing results from the data. Instead, the researcher analyzes the data by way of her or his own personal story and thereby facilitates the readers' ability to identify with the material and find unique and personal meaning therein. Throughout the process of organic inquiry, the individual reader's potential transformation is held by the researcher to be the goal of the work. This transformation may be a small insight or a major revisioning of oneself. The researcher serves as the facilitator between the primary material and each reader. She or he aims at harvesting some part of the essential wisdom of the topic and directly presenting it to the individual reader by way of stories which re-create the experiences of the participants.

This goal of transformation calls for a greater level of participation than is usual for a reader of research. Rather than reviewing the introduction and the results, the reader must read the research as if it were a novel, story by story.

As the name implies, the method of each organic study is a creative process and therefore the researcher is called to pay attention to the suggestions of the inner voice of the research itself which speaks by way of dreams, coincidences, or intuitive knowing and to adjust the operation of the method accordingly. The method is never frozen but is constantly responding to the creative shouts and whispers of the primary wisdom of the research itself.

The organic researcher who is revealing her or his own personal story is

in a vulnerable and humble place that subdues the ego so that the unconscious world of dreams and non-rational influence may take its place in the evolution of the research. This chthonic, underground realm is a rich source of inspiration that tends to elude a researcher who chooses to operate within the boundaries of strictly objective and rational methods, assuming control of the research. It is our experience that topics of an intimate and sacred nature can best be explored with methods which are also allowed to operate beyond the confines of ego.

Transpersonal psychology has stepped forward from prior systems of psychology by stating its intention to honor all modes of human experience, not only mental and emotional but physical and spiritual as well. Organic inquiry has emerged out of this transpersonal movement's call to consciousness which acknowledges the inseparability of one individual's experiences and actions from those of the greater community and thereby calls for impeccable honesty and responsibility instead of a sense of superiority or competition. This requires an attitude of reverence toward all aspects of the research.

Organic studies to date seem to be motivated by a desire on the part of the researcher to investigate and share the meaning of her or his own deeply-held experience in order to improve the life of another, by a desire for social and individual transformation, a goal which mirrors the high ideals of both the feminist and transpersonal movements.

So we may see that at one end of a continuum which represents the process of an organic study, we find the spirit of the research topic as a muse or a deity, perhaps a personified image with a twinkle in her eye who knows the truths of the topic under investigation. She holds universal teachings and is ready to share them with the world. At the other end of the continuum is a group of future readers who are ready to be taught individual lessons from among these truths. Each is on a different path so no two will receive the truths in the same way. In the middle, stands the researcher who is the facilitator or the channel, the connection between the all-knowing muse and the hungry reader. The researcher listens for the often unfamiliar and uncomfortable messages from the muse about how to do the research. The researcher strains to learn her language. These messages arrive in chthonic forms as dreams or sudden intuitions or even tape recorders that refuse to rewind. Rarely linear or explicit, these messages must be translated by the researcher so that their truths may be passed on to the readers.

We four are awed by the chthonic way in which this methodology seems to have a life of its own and an urgency to be made available. We have experienced a remarkable amount of support and interest in a

methodology which grew not from the intellectual exploration by four scholars of research but from the collaborative work of four curious beginners as well as our students and our colleagues who wanted a better way to study human experience. We are like archeologists who have discovered the outline of a magnificent city in the desert sand. Slowly, we brush away thousands of years of accumulated silt and room after room is revealed. We find patterns on the walls of individual houses and we discover how the streets connect one part of town to another. We are thrilled as each new discovery illuminates and confirms what we already know.

List of Organic Inquiry Studies

Institute of Transpersonal Psychology Dissertations Using Organic Inquiry

(In chronological order)

Dorothy Ettling - *A Phenomenological Study of the Creative Arts as a Pathway to Embodiment in the Personal Transformation Process of Nine Women*, Methodology - Feminist and Phenomenological, May, 1994.

Lisa Shields - *The Experience of Beauty, Body Image and the Feminine in Three Generations of Mothers and Daughters*, Methodology - Feminist, Heuristic and Organic, May 1995.

Linda Bushell Spencer - *The Transpersonal and Healing Dimensions of Painting: Life Reviews of Ten Artists Who Have Experienced Trauma*, Methodology - Feminist using an Organic approach, May 1995.

Nora Taylor - *Women's Experience of the Descent into The Underworld: The Path of Inanna*. A Feminist and Heuristic Inquiry, Methodology - Feminist, Heuristic and Organic, May 1996.

Wendy L. Rogers - *A Heuristic Inquiry into Loss of Fertility that Occurred During the Childbearing Years as Experienced by Eight Women*, Methodology - Heuristic with Organic, May 1996.

Susan J. Newton - *Exploring the Interstices: The Space between in the Body/Mind Disciplines of Aikido and Fencing*, Methodology - Organic, May 1996.

Annick Safken - *Sufi Stories as a Vehicle for Self-Development* :

Exploration by In-depth Interviews, of the Effects of a Prolonged and Intentional Exposure to Sufi Stories, Methodology - Narrative Interviews and Organic, May 1997.

Linda K. Loos - *Sitting in Council : An Ecopsychological Approach to Working With Stories in Wilderness Rites of Passage*, Methodology - Organic, May 1997

Leslie Sidle - *Happily Ever After - Again: Love Relationships of Divorced Women at Midlife*, Methodology - Organic with Heuristic, May 1997

ITP Master's Theses Using Organic Research

Sally Boyce Singingtree - *Ancient Tools/ New Paths: Invoking the Divine Feminine for Contemporary Women* - Methodology - Organic, May 1996.

Colleen R. Russell - *Coming Home to her Self Stories of Women Returning to the Feminine to Reclaim Their Authentic Selves* - Methodology - Feminist/Organic, December, 1997

Dissertations Using Organic Inquiry Currently In Process:

Marilyn R. Veltrop - *Business Leaders in Transition: A Study of Their Midlife Transformational Journeys in Midlife and Beyond*, Methodology - Organic, proposal.

Dianne Jenett - *Cooking for Kannaki: An Ethnographic/Organic Research Study of the Pongala Ritual for Bhagavati at the Attukal Temple in Kerala, South India*, Methodology - Ethnographic/Organic, proposal, California Institute of Integral Studies.

Maja Apolonia Rode - *The Spiritual Presence of Beauty*, Methodology - Organic and Heuristic, proposal.

Caryl Reimer Gopfert - *Student Experiences of Betrayal in the Zen Buddhist Teacher/student Relationship*, Methodology - Organic with Heuristic, proposal.

Dea Ciofflica - *Collage as Mirror: Finding Your Own Voice Through Creativity*, Methodology - Organic, mini-proposal.

Sandra Magnussen - *The Psychological Relevance of Tibetan Buddhist Teachings: Six Western Psychotherapists Describe the Ways in Which their Buddhist Practice and Relationship with a Guru have Influenced their Clinical Work*, Methodology - Organic, mini-proposal.

Giles, Sophie Parker - *The Unnested Woman: Metaphors of Renewal in Dreams of Midlife Women who are Experiencing Divorce from a Longtime Mate*, Methodology - Organic/Heuristic, mini-proposal.

Loffer, Shirley - *Beyond Survival: Women Thriving with Chronic Illness*, Methodology - a collage of Heuristic, Organic, Feminist and Collaborative Inquiry, proposal in process.

Hutter, Denise - *Weaving the Fabric of Culture: How Personal and Collective Wisdom Arises in Young Adults Participating in a Wilderness Rite of Passage*, Methodology - Organic, mini-proposal.

Organic Inquiry Studies

Dorothy Ettling & Robin Clark - *Crossing the Border* - Organic inquiry study

Dorothy Ettling & Neomi Hayes - *Learning to Learn* - Organic inquiry project.

Dorothy Ettling - *There is Another Story - There is Another Way: How Women are Transforming Communities* - Organic inquiry proposal.

Jennifer Clements and Pam Davison - *Crossing: Two Women's Journey Into Menopause*, organic study.

Jennifer Clements with Rachel Rivers - *Riding the Blue Tiger: Stories of Partnership with Spirit*, organic study

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