

**The Notion of Motion: Understanding *Bricolage* and the
Creation of Personal Relationships as Definitional Processes**

by

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**Walter John Carl III. The Notion of Motion: Understanding *Bricolage* and the Creation of Personal Relationships as Definitional Processes
(Under the direction of Julia T. Wood.)**

In this study, I employed an in-depth personal narrative approach with three participants to learn whether or not people drew upon symbolic and material resources to continually (re)create their personal relationships. I drew upon Claude Levi-Strauss's concepts of *bricoleur* and *bricolage* to understand the processual nature of how people work with symbolic and material resources in a concrete, improvisational, and creative manner. Each of the participants' narratives presented evidence to suggest that participants acted as bricoleurs to perform their sexual identity and to (re)create and make sense of their personal relationships. I discussed the implications of bricolage to future research on communication and personal relationships. Also, I reflected on the researcher-participant relationships that emerged throughout the study, and the process of social accountability within an academic institution.

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The Notion of Motion¹

“You know, what I really want right now is a relationship.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean, I haven’t been in a relationship for months now.”

Threads of conversations like this one can be heard in our everyday encounters and interactions. The webs of meanings in such conversations are woven with personal, social, and cultural strands. To come to a greater awareness of what is involved in such conversations, we can ask questions like: What is “a relationship”? What does it mean for one to be “in” a relationship? How do two people understand what “a relationship” is enough even to talk about one? In turn, these questions invite further study of such questions as: (1) What does it mean for persons to define their relationships? (2) Do definitions of people in relationships shape experiences and interpretations in relationships? (3) Can definition be understood as a creative process that constitutes relationships?

This research project will focus on how persons perform the creative process of defining personal relationships. More specifically, it will seek to understand how persons work with the bits and pieces of experiences from the distinct, yet interconnected, realms of personal life, social interaction, and cultural membership to engage in the always unfinished business of performing and constructing their personal relationships. In this chapter I will provide an overview of existing research relevant to this study; state my research questions, methodological approach, and personal rationale for conducting this study; discuss the values, assumptions, and limitations of my project; and then conclude with a brief overview of subsequent chapters of this thesis.

¹ Thanks to Mohammed Ali for his fluidity and this graceful quotation.

Overview of Existing Research

What *is* a relationship? The key word in this question is the verb “is” which brings us into the realm of definitions (Burke, 1966). A definition is the articulation of an essence (Burke, 1945). The essence or substance of a subject purportedly identifies the subject or object’s intrinsic nature -- what it is in and of itself. However, the root or etymological history of the words substance and essence include “standing under” or “support,” that is, something that is necessarily external to the subject or object. To speak of what something necessarily is (intrinsic), we must speak of what it is not (extrinsic). Kenneth Burke calls this the paradox of substance.

Every time we speak we are confronted with the problem of articulating everything in the universe. In his discussion of terministic screens, Burke (1966) notes that although we need to use definitions, we can not encapsulate everything in our definitions and we necessarily exclude things. When we define, we select one thing out of reality, thus necessarily deflecting other aspects of reality; the definitions we choose reflect the reality that we have selected, as well as the reality we have deflected. The selectivity of definitions has been noted by Duck (1994) in his discussion of Burke: “The choice of terms to emphasize is not determined or dictated by the behavior being explained but is chosen by the observer/explainer...” (p. 79).

When the two people in the conversation that opened this chapter discuss being “in” a relationship, they implicitly refer to some kind of boundaries or limits so that certain phenomena fall within these boundaries and other phenomena are excluded. This implicit reference exemplifies Burke’s argument regarding terministic screens and the paradox of substance argument -- to speak of what something is, we also implicitly (do not) speak of what it is not.

The boundaries implicit in definitions are not static and rigid, but change, or flow, over time. The term “flow” has been used by researchers to describe relationship processes (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), various sensations (e.g., the flow of optimal experience, being in the flow; Csikszentmihalyi, 1991), and states of existence (as in some Eastern thought). I use the term flow initially to connote the image of water *flowing*. This water symbolizes the continuous, fluid, ever-changing flux that the Sophists identified. For the purposes of this project, the flowing water is a metaphor for personal relationships. Water -- for instance, in a river -- flows in a certain pattern, but not necessarily towards any constant particular end-point. The pattern does not remain the same over time; its movement is influenced by surrounding elements such as land, rocks, weather patterns, and weeds. These influences can be thought of as boundaries that create the conditions simultaneously to limit and enable the water to flow in a particular, yet changeable, pattern.

These boundaries refer to what I have previously discussed as a definition. When the land, rocks, weather, or weeds shift, so does the flow of the water; concurrently, the flow of the water over and around the weeds and rocks and land slowly erodes and affects them and changes the shape of the surrounding elements (a dialectical effect of relaters defining the relationship and the relationship defining the relaters). As the relationship and relaters change, the surrounding elements change, just as when the surrounding elements change, the relaters and the relationship changes. So then, the relaters and the definition (which creates, constitutes, bounds, limits and enables “a relationship”) are fluid and continually flow; that is, they are in process.

To describe a relationship as “flowing” is not to say that patterns of relating are always smooth and easy business, nor that they are always rapidly moving. Sometimes, the flow becomes stagnant (as in a pool of water), sometimes gentle, calm, and serene (like a babbling brook), other times smooth and consistent (like a steady stream), and still other times rough and wild (like roaring rapids). The point is that whether the water is seemingly stagnant, calm, steady, or rough, a relationship is always flowing, even though we call it

“stagnant,” “steady,” or “rough.” This is all to say that the flow is always occurring, it is always *doing something*.

It is important to recognize that the ways people define their personal relationships are not limited exclusively to explicit, verbal statements, such as “Our relationship is a friendship.” Although explicit, verbal statements are one way people define personal relationships, definitions may also be enacted through routine patterns of interaction (how long people talk with each other, what is (not) talked about, how it is talked about, etc.), relationship symbols (wearing a friend’s necklace, eating at a favorite restaurant, listening to “our song,” etc.), significant experiences (birth of a child, losing one’s job, moving to a new location, death of a loved one, etc.). All of these (and more) are ways people relate with others and contribute to the process of defining “a relationship.”

Two concepts introduced by Claude Levi-Strauss (1966), *bricolage* and *bricoleur*, further illuminate the concept of “relationship flow.” In French vernacular, a bricoleur is a practical person or group of people who performs odd-jobs and do-it-yourself projects. For these projects, the bricoleur takes whatever materials she or he can find that are lying around to fashion a particular project. Bricolage is the process of assembling these concrete bits and pieces into a form or structure. The structure that is made depends upon the available resources lying around. The engineer, in contrast to the bricoleur, already has an abstract, pre-existing structure in mind and utilizes specific materials designed to make concrete the abstract structure.

In an insightful and provocative article, Richard Conville (1997) applies the perspective of bricoleur and bricolage to personal relationship research. Conville advances the analogy that relaters (persons-in-relationships, everyday folk) perform as practical bricoleurs actively working with those materials readily at hand to create their personal relationships. For example, when a person becomes a parent, there is no set of abstract guidelines for how to take care of children. Many people learn to “make do” with the available resources surrounding them. Parents as bricoleurs may draw upon a piece of advice from

another parent, improvise a dish cloth into a temporary diaper for an accident, and learn from past mistakes. In contrast, parents as engineers arrive on the scene with a carefully laid out, pre-existing plan; their actions are guided by abstract principles and guidelines which they will enact methodically towards a pre-defined end.

There may be times when people approach situations more as bricoleurs and other times when people approach situations more like an engineer. Conville (1997, p. 1) sees value in the concept of the bricoleur because it “calls attention to the centrality of processes in relationships” and points to the “nature and source of materials for conducting relationships, their portability from one relationship to another, and their social-dialogical dimension.” Additionally, bricolage suggests the Greek notion of *topos*, literally translated as place (Todorov, 1984). One way *topos* can be understood is as a space that holds materials, the topics, from which interlocutors may draw to create common ground. Just as interlocutors go to places and collect the material (the *topoi*) to forge common ground with one another, bricoleurs go to places in their personal experiences, social communities, and cultural repositories to create shared, and still distinct, definitions of personal relationships.

The material and discursive resources upon which relaters draw and the ways that relaters define their personal relationships are informed by personal factors (e.g., previous relationship experiences, familial background; Bartholomew, 1993), social standpoints (e.g., gender, race, class, sexual orientation; Kramarae, 1996; West, 1995; Wood, 1995b), and cultural meanings (e.g., what it means to be “a friend”; Duck, West, & Acitelli, 1997; Mead, 1934). Identification of personal, social, and cultural dimensions is not to imply that these are independent categories, but rather to distinguish and locate the multiple and often overlapping sites of materials drawn upon by bricoleurs. The materials that a given culture, a social community, and personal experiences

provide enables and constrains the types of relationships and ways of relating available to people. This is all to say that relaters and relationships must be contextualized in terms of (at least) personal experiences, social communities, and cultural membership (Duck, West, & Acitelli, 1997).

In continuation, this research project will focus on the creative activities of the bricoleur and these everyday bits of personal experiences, membership in social communities, and cultural meanings that relaters (persons-in-relationships, bricoleurs) utilize to (re)define their personal relationships. In the rest of this chapter I identify my research questions and describe methodology, followed by a discussion of the values, assumptions, and limitations of this project, and an overview of subsequent chapters.

Statement of Research Questions, Methodology, and Personal Rationale

For this project, I ask the following two questions:

- How do people create and define their personal relationships?
- Are Levi-Strauss's concepts of bricolage and bricoleur useful as analytic lenses to understand how people create their personal relationships?

The methodology for this research was informed by a call from Duck, West, & Acitelli (1997, p. 19): "Ask the partners *in depth* about their relationships in a search for narrative themes and take across time assessments of what people are actually *doing* in relationships." This project studied how people create their personal relationships through participants' personal narratives. This methodological approach will be elaborated in Chapter 3.

The personal narrative approach I used in this study involved six in-depth, personal conversations and shared experiences about personal relationships with each participant. These conversations transpired over a period of about two months. Some examples of shared experiences are getting a cup of coffee with a participant and discussing personal relationship issues and going out to a movie together that relates to personal relationships and then discussing what the participant and I thought about the movie. The purpose of having shared

experiences together over a two month period of time was to create relationships with the participants that allowed for a richer, more personal understanding of how participants define their personal relationships. Considering the length of time available to complete this study and the in-depth nature of this methodological approach, I worked with three participants.

Throughout the shared experiences and conversations I audio tape recorded our conversations (after gaining permission from each participant) and/or wrote field notes. Throughout the two month period with each participant, I interpreted the field notes and transcriptions of recorded conversations using the concepts of bricolage and bricoleur as analytic perspectives. An analogy to help understand this analytic process is to think about reading a novel and attempting to describe the sub-text of the novel. What is the sub-text? Why is understanding the sub-text informative? Applied to this study, I focused on two questions: (1) Throughout the participants' personal narratives, what personal experiences, membership in social communities, cultural meanings, etc. are ingredients that bricoleurs draw upon to fashion their personal relationships? (2) Is there textual evidence to suggest that a particular explanation of a person's activity as a bricoleur is more compelling than (an)other reading(s)? This interpretive process was informed by phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches, and will be elaborated upon in Chapter 3.

After the interviews and shared experiences, I printed out copies of the transcriptions for the participants to review. This allowed participants to change, delete, and/or elaborate information from our interviews (Borland, 1991). The values of this more collaborative research effort will be discussed in Chapter 3.

I will now position myself within this study to provide a fuller understanding of why this topic, this methodological approach, and the population of participants were well-suited to my study. For a long time now I've been interested in how people change over time. Part of this process of change is creating and continuously revising one's personal identity. Entering graduate school for me marked a significant change in my life. I thought about

this process of constructing a new identity for myself as a process of (re)creation and realized that we are always, already (re)creating our lives; that is, we have “already” been creating our lives in certain patterns (maybe without being aware of it) and we “always” will be (re)creating our lives.

This process of creating a new identity affects not only me, but also how I relate with others and how they, in turn, define themselves and interact with me and others. This process has been so significant for me that I could not rely upon the old ways of going about “doing” relationships. I had to start almost literally from scratch, figuring out things as I went along. I had no carefully laid out plan -- I did not act as an engineer -- for how I would do this; rather, I just started drawing on disconnected bits and pieces of experiences in order to create anew how I would define myself and interact with others. It was this especially transformative period in my life that attracted me to the idea that we always, already create our personal relationships. While I was engaged in my personal transformative project, I encountered the concepts of bricolage and bricoleur. Like the bricoleur, I did and do draw on bits and pieces of personal experiences, observations of others in my social communities, and larger cultural definitions and meanings in order to (re)create my personal relationships. Although I feel it appropriate to use the language that we “create” our personal relationships, this is not to imply that people are radically autonomous agents who live fully aware of all their actions and the ramifications of those actions, nor that they are completely free to create new ways of relating. In fact, throughout this time of my life I gained a better understanding of the powerful social forces that shape our experiences. These social forces create what regard as common sense, that which is taken-for-granted. These social and cultural “givens” constitute enormous resources that I subsequently drew on to create new ways of relating. Furthermore, our own personal histories, not neatly distinct from social and cultural forces, powerfully shape the resources available to draw upon.

My choice to work with people who identify themselves as bisexual/queer was also informed by an understanding of larger social and cultural forces, as well as Levi-Strauss’s concepts of bricoleur and bricolage. In a culture that

defines heterosexuality as the norm (although there is some evidence to suggest this norm is becoming less rigid), people who challenge “heterosexuality” have few, if any, widely legitimated scripts and cultural definitions regarding how to go about conducting the business of relating with others. It would seem to me that this makes it even more necessary for people who are bisexual/queer to focus on creating their relationships because they must generate creative responses to deal with relational situations that segments of the larger culture do not necessarily support or deem legitimate. Consequently, studying the personal narratives of queer individuals seemed especially likely to illuminate the concept of the bricoleur as a practical person who undertakes odd (maybe even “queer”) jobs and works with whatever materials are available and well suited to a research project that sought to learn more about how people in general define and create their personal relationships.

My desire to learn more about the lives of people who experience their personal relationships as bisexual/queer combines my own personal perspective with disciplinary and theoretical considerations. I share disciplinary and theoretical interests with Julia Wood and Steve Duck (1995, p. 13) who argue that a field that identifies itself as one that studies personal and social relationships should “comprise the range of close associations that people form,” not just those relationships that are socially and culturally legitimated which have been traditionally represented in, and as the purview of, relationship scholarship. Consistent and still predominant exclusion of bisexuals, gays, and lesbians from relationship research is inconsistent with Wood and Duck’s position.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I will discuss the values, assumptions, and limitations of my project, and then present a brief overview for subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Values of Study

This research project is valuable for four reasons. First, as I have already noted, this project responds to burgeoning trends in the field of personal

relationships by focusing on Duck's (1990) call for a more processual view of personal relationships and by continuing to address the question posed to the field at the beginning of this decade, "What is a personal relationship?" (Duck, 1990). Additionally, this project incorporates an emergent trend to draw on theoretical perspectives from a rhetorical, discursive perspective to study personal relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Duck, 1994; Shotter, 1992) and to make central the processes of everyday talk and routines (Duck, 1990; Wood, 1995a). Furthermore, there is primary emphasis on *relating* and viewing people as active creators in their relationships embedded within social and cultural contexts and constraints (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Duck, West, & Acitelli, 1997).

Second, the idea of "relationship flow" resists some of the cultural biases that developmental models historically have been prone to reinscribe on human associations (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Wood, 1993). For example, Knapp's (1978) developmental model locates the pinnacle of a relationship at a stage called "bonding," which refers to a publicly visible and verbal commitment that is recognized legally and socially and, thus, applies only to heterosexual romantic partners who marry (for critique, see Wood, 1993). To define this stage as "bonding" excludes certain populations (e.g., gays, lesbians, bisexuals, friendships, etc.). The concept of "relationship flow," in contrast, still accounts for a processual, evolving nature of relating and for how definitions and continuous redefinitions constitute our personal relationships. Relationship flow does not stipulate particular points/stages/phases/pinnacles and does not issue normative claims about the best way to go about relating.

Third, the methodological approach of this project contributes to increasing calls for use of narratives to understand what people actually *do* in their relating (Arnold, 1995; Conville, 1996; Duck, West, and Acitelli, 1997; Wood, 1993). This study also explores the utility of the bricolage perspective and the concept of "relationship flow" as analytic lenses for research on communication and personal relationships.

Finally, this study focuses on the understudied relationships and the relating

of people who do not conform to “heterosexual” ways of relating as defined in U.S. culture. Wood and Duck (1995, p. 5) assert two interrelated reasons to study people-in-relationships that are “off the beaten track” of “white, middle-class, male, heterosexual, Western young people.” First, studying the relationships of people who traditionally have been underrepresented in research raises awareness of ways of relating that may not be employed by members of the majority population. This can increase understanding of experiences that may have been misrepresented or erased as a result of focusing almost exclusively on majority groups. Rather than just adding and stirring underrepresented groups into existing theoretical approaches (Spitzack & Carter, 1987), there is a second, more provocative reason to study underrepresented groups. Inquiry into historically marginalized groups may reveal different patterns of relating that challenge existing frameworks and theories, thus exposing embedded, taken-for-granted assumptions (Wood & Duck, 1995). Consequently, my research has the potential to refine and extend existing theories of relating and, perhaps, to generate new theories and approaches that are more inclusive of their predecessors.

Assumptions

Along with the belief that personal relationships are significant to people’s lives and worthy of study, I assumed that people are agents who, along with their personal relationships, are continually changing and in process. Additionally, I assumed these active relaters are both enabled and constrained, as well as contextualized, by personal experiences, participation in social communities, and cultural membership. I further assumed that discourse shapes/constitutes/creates/constructs relationships and that we can only come to experience a relationship as “a relationship” through discursive and dialogical processes. Third, in conjunction with this discursive and dialogical perspective, I assumed that relationships are dialectical in nature. That is, I believe that relaters and their definitions of relationships dialectically play off each other; relaters

define relationships and, in turn, relationships define relaters (Wood, 1982, 1995a). By extension, I assumed there are significant dialectical tensions (e.g., autonomy–connection, stability–change) that characterize personal relationships, and I will be attentive to the presence of these dialectics in my analyses of my conversations with participants.

Limitations of Project

This project has six limitations that I recognized. First, the study was limited by its number of participants. To complete my master’s thesis in a timely manner and to rely on a personal narrative approach, working with three participants seemed realistic. Although this is a limitation from a traditional social scientific perspective, the goal of this study was not to make claims that can be generalized to all populations, or even to all who identify themselves as bisexual/queer, which is a rationale given for large numbers of participants in a study. Rather, this study seeks an in-depth understanding of how three people experience their relationships as creative processes, not unlike the phenomenological approach Conville (1988) worked with in his study of relational transitions with two spouses’ narrative accounts. Instead of attempting to discover an accurate, generalizable representation of “the bisexual experience” (not that one would even exist to be found), a more suitable assessment of the value of this project is the “depth of insight” gained from exploring creative relationship processes from a few participants (Todorov, 1984).

Second, this research project was limited by its conceptual and methodological originality. With the exception of Conville’s (1997) article, the concepts of bricolage and bricoleur have not been used in personal relationship research. In his study, Conville worked with narratives from three novels; he did not rely on a more ethnographic, personal narrative approach that this study employs (itself a rarely used methodological approach in personal relationship literature; see Wood, 1992 for a personal narrative approach to the study of

sexual harassment and Arnold, 1995 for a personal narrative approach regarding cross-sex and same-sex friendships). The limitation then, as discussed briefly above in the methodological section of this chapter, is that I was uncertain how fruitful this methodological approach would be. I suggest, however, that its potential values rendered it worthy of exploration.

Third, this study was limited by the amount of time I spent with participants. The two months during which I interacted with each participant, although considerably longer than many studies, did not permit assessments of how their relationship definitions may change over longer periods of time, except as those are reflected in retrospective comments (Duck & Pond, 1989).

Fourth, I did not engage directly much of the theoretical and political discussion concerning bisexual and/or queer theory. I did not find it necessary to work intensively with this material to understand bricoleurs' general processes of relating. At the same time, I recognize and embrace the political and theoretical implications (as discussed above) of studying people from populations that have been traditionally underrepresented and not equally legitimized by the larger culture.

Fifth, this research inquiry did not attempt to induce normative standards for how people *should* create the content of their relationships. For example, I do not argue that there is a better way of relating, or better definitions for personal relationships, than other ways. Instead, I attempted to describe and understand the form and process of how participants in my study create their personal relationships.

Sixth, my ability to talk about the processual flow of personal relating is constrained by linguistic conventions of the English language. For example, "relationships" are often discussed in noun form, as static containers that hold their participants. It is less frequent that more processual language is used (e.g., relating). Furthermore, when two romantic partners break up, conventional language is that the relationship "ends," or one gets "out of a relationship." Yet, we still may interact or think about the relationship with that person. It may be more accurate to talk about relationships being redefined or changed, rather

than ending or beginning, or even better, to talk about ways of relating that change over time. I will elaborate upon these points about linguistic constraints in Chapter 5.

Overview of Chapters 2-5

Chapter 2 of this project begins with a review of literature that ties together the various theoretical threads of the concept relationship flow and then further explicates the concepts of bricolage and bricoleur as analytic perspectives. Chapter 3 discusses the methodological approach of this study. Chapter 4 presents the results from this research project, and Chapter 5 will make “tentatively firm”² conclusions based on this study, reflections on this study and its contributions, as well as offer points of continuation for further study.

² The phrase “tentatively firm” has been ripped off wholesale from Julia Wood.

Laying the Bricolage Foundation

This chapter discusses theoretical perspectives that inform this study. After reviewing literature relevant to key terms of this project -- creation, process, and definition -- I trace usages of the bricolage/bricoleur perspective from Claude Levi-Strauss's original anthropological work to current extensions into personal relationship research. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of two central themes embodied by the bricolage perspective: creativity and improvisation as viewed through the lens of relational-dialectics.

Key Terms

Three key terms are implicated in this research project and all are intricately interconnected and must be understood in relation to each other. These three terms are definition, process, and creation. As one can trace any finger down into the palm of the hand and return back up another finger, we can begin our understanding of any one of the three terms and end up at the others as illustrated by the following statements: definition is a creative process; creation is a process of definition; and a process creates definitions. This section will discuss each of these terms and then explore Claude Levi-Strauss's concepts of bricoleur and bricolage.

Definition is a creative process

What *is* a relationship? As noted in Chapter 1, definitions are efforts to articulate what something is. These efforts, as previously discussed, both include, or select, and exclude, or deflect, aspects of what is being defined. Continuing this discussion of definitions I launched in Chapter 1, I wish now

to focus on the creativity inherent in the process of defining.

How is definition creative or generative? Let's begin with an example. If Agnés defines her friendship with Rebecca as hanging out together and talking, without sexual overtones, and then Agnés and Rebecca have a sexual experience with each other, they are confronted with a choice -- a generative opportunity. Agnés can now say that sex is cool with friends, or at least with Rebecca (selecting a boundary that will both include and exclude sexual experiences and others). Alternatively, Agnés can re-define her relationship with Rebecca as say, romantic partners, assuming that this definition includes sexual activities. (Of course another possibility might be that they never to speak to each other again, which would also be a way of defining their relationship.) The point is that Agnés' previous definition becomes unsatisfactory in light of a new experience, and she thus confronts choices (generative opportunities), two of which could be to define sex as part of friendship, or re-define her relationship with Rebecca as a romance, rather than a friendship.

This illustrates the creative process that inheres in defining relationships. We define our world, selecting certain aspects and deflecting others. Those aspects that are deflected are generative, or creative, opportunities that may later give rise to new definitions that include what currently is excluded, as well as exclude certain aspects that were once included. This definitional process is continuously going on as a business that is always, already unfinished (Duck, 1990).

Creation is a process of definition

To say that "creation is a process of definition" is to argue that discourse/language/definitions create, or constitute, experienced reality. The process of naming "defines what it is we recognize as constituting the world and our experiences in it" (Wood, 1992). Drawing on the writings of Mead (1934), Blumer (1969), and Spender (1984), Julia Wood presented sexual harassment as a compelling example of how naming constitutes reality. Wood argued that only

in recent years has “sexual harassment” been named. Prior to this time what we now refer to as sexual harassment happened frequently, but it was not experienced as such until it was spoken into a discursive reality and granted the cultural legitimacy that the process of naming, of definition, confers.

In their classic article “Marriage and the Construction of Reality,” Berger and Kellner (1964) argued that “the reality of the world is sustained through conversation with significant others” (p. 1) and that each partner’s definition of reality must be continually coordinated with the other partner’s definitions. Steve Duck (1990, 1994) echoed this concern for a focus on the importance of talk as a continuous way of conducting the “unfinished business” of relating. Duck (1990) emphasized the creative functions of talk when he asserted that talk “actually embodies the relationship and defines it” (p. 21). Gergen (1988) added to this perspective when he highlighted the inherently social nature of discourse; that is, he argued that there is no reality independent of the discourse that constitutes it, and this constitutive process is necessarily a “property of social interchange” (p. 40).

Thus far, I have argued that definition is a creative process and that the creation of reality is inexorably tied to a process of definition. Next, I will consider how a process creates definitions.

Process creates definitions

A question the exchange that opened Chapter 1 broaches is, What does it mean for one to be “in” a relationship? Julia Wood defines personal relationships as “voluntary commitments that are constantly in process and marked by continuing, significant interdependence between particular individuals who are irreplaceable” (1995a, p. 6). This definition recognizes that personal relationships are always in process. Duck (1990) contributed to our understanding of this point as he writes of relationships as unfinished business. By this, Duck meant that relationships are continually changing and evolving -- never remaining static. As Duck and others note, patterns that are created for

how people relate with one another will be re-created and transformed over time (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Wood, 1995b). Duck and others (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996; Duck, 1990; Duck, West, & Acitelli, 1997) criticize existing research that views people as being “in” relationships. This “container” view of relationships “depicts relationships as monolithic entities passing along charted pathways and having a constant identity” (Duck, West, & Acitelli, 1997, p. 20). This view (mis)represents relationships as static containers within which individuals exist. This view does not take into account the processual flow that characterizes human relatedness.

As an alternative to static views of personal relationships, Duck calls for a more processual view (talking more about “relating” rather than being “in relationships”). To respond to Duck’s call relationship researchers need to develop a fuller understanding of what a process is. Duck (1990, p. 18) defined processes as “transitions between states which are clearly recognized and easily definable end-points” (emphasis mine) and identifies time as the essence of a process. Duck also criticized research on relationship processes for focusing too much on the end-points and not enough on the “movement that is continuous” between the end-points (p. 18). But even to talk about end-points is misleading. If a process is characterized by continuous movement and change, then there is no real end. For a fuller appreciation of the continuously flowing nature of a process, we can turn back in time to pay a visit to the Sophists.

The Sophists believed that the world was in a constant state of flux -- pure experience. Definitions are efforts to articulate and give form to this flow of experience. Long before Burke, the Sophists saw definition as an attribution of a thing's essence, that is, an expression of what a thing is (a positive) and what a thing is not (a negative). There are necessarily processes of inclusion and exclusion in definition because the world is continually changing. The Sophists saw the act of defining an experience as a deception because a definition masquerades as a complete capturing of a thing's essence, that is, a certainty of what a thing is (and, always being both/and for the Sophists, what a thing is not). Due to the processual flux and inevitable exclusion within definitions, a definition does not capture everything that something is, that is, its essence. For the Sophists, the necessary incompleteness of any definition was something to be valued because it represents an openness, an opportunity, a generative possibility, to the truth of "getting at" or capturing more of what is missing or hidden (the excluded portion) in the definition. Because a definition attempts to capture something which is in flux, definitions (language) must also be continually in flux.

If we understand the nature of a process to be continuous flux, then we are closer to understanding how a process creates definitions. Because we can not get around in our day to day lives if we experience them as in continuous change, we need to make sense of the flux. To do so, we draw lines in the world as a means of boundary control. In short, we define the world. For example, when confronted with the challenge of trying to understand communication in its totality, we realize we cannot do it. In response to this, we draw boundaries around those things that include what we will attempt to study and exclude all the other aspects. As we seek to understand different aspects, we re-draw the lines, we re-define our definitions.

The end-states to which Duck (1990) alluded are those parts that we recognize *only* because we or the contexts in which we exist have defined them. For example, in a model of relationship development, the various stages are recognizable because we have defined them and attached labels, names, to them. What we choose to label depends on personal experiences, membership in social communities, and participation in larger cultural contexts. If we have different personal and familial experiences, grow up in another culture, and so forth, we will draw the lines (name the stages) differently. Conversely, if we draw the lines differently, we will experience the flux differently. Burke (1945, p. 415) makes this argument in A Grammar of Motives: “In sum, one’s initial act in choosing where to ‘draw the line’ by choosing terms that merge or terms that divide has an anticipatory effect upon one’s conclusion.”

Identifying end states affects not only relaters, but also the views and findings of researchers. Wood and Duck (1995) note that the ways researchers define personal relationships guide how researchers study relationships. For example, if relationships are defined as commercial arrangements that operate according to cost-benefit analysis, as social exchange perspectives argue, then researchers are more prone to select those aspects of relationships that conform to social exchange principles and, simultaneously, to deflect aspects, such as sacrifices and care for others, that do not conform to the definition.

There is a sense that defining stops the flow of relationships, although the Sophists maintain that this a deception. Again, a definition posits an essence: “our relationship is a friendship” -- this is what it *is*. However, this definition is really only decided “tentatively firmly,” that is, it is a working definition; it will always, already change. Decisions are made only for the moment, and this is one reason to think of definitions as flowing. The argument presented in this section, then, is that because a process is characterized by continuous flux, and because humans seek some way to make sense of this flux (ourselves being in flux and not separate from what we perceive as the flux around us), humans create flowing definitions to get around in everyday life. Thus, a process necessarily creates definitions.

These three terms -- process, creation, and definition -- are central to my argument about how people relate. The ways people continually (re)create ways of relating with others shape how they define their various relationships. As I stated before, how a relationship is defined is not limited exclusively to a verbal pronouncement such as "This relationship is a friendship." Rather, following Gee's (1989) discussion of "discourse," how we relate with others is a matter of social practices, that is, combinations of "saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing" (p. 2).

In setting up a framework that emphasizes how people create and define their personal relationships, I want to stress vigorously two points. First, I do not believe that people are independent entities who seek out other independent entities and then relate with them. The discursive formations that construct the self and other are the same forces that construct relationships/ways of relating (Gergen, 1988; Shotter, 1992; Wood, 1992, 1995, 1996). Second, my use of the terms creation and creativity does not imply a vision of individuals engaging in a nice, harmonious activity with unlimited choices for how they want to create a relationship. Rather, my use of creativity recognizes a process where relaters must respond actively to continuously changing situations that are informed by historical givens (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). To explore further the process of how people carry on the everyday business of relating, I will now discuss Levi-Strauss's notions of bricoleur and bricolage.

Bricolage and the Work of the Bricoleur

Working out of a structuralist framework, Claude Levi-Strauss introduced the term bricolage in his book, The Savage Mind (1966). He used the term to illustrate the manner in which “primitive” people drew upon the raw materials (e.g., trees, animals, and other elements of nature) available to them in their surrounding environments to construct myths. In contrast to the “civilized” engineer, who progresses in a formulaic, methodical manner, the bricoleur is an everyday, improvisational, do-it-yourselfer who draws on materials that happen to be lying around to fashion projects. Previous anthropological research insisted that “primitive” people acted in illogical and irrational ways, as opposed to the logical, rational Western societies. Levi-Strauss argued, however, that “primitive” societies operated according to their own legitimate logic, that of bricolage, but distinct from that of the engineer and Western rationality. Levi-Strauss argued that “it is important not to make the mistake of thinking that these [bricoleur and engineer approaches] are two stages or phases in the evolution of knowledge. Both approaches are equally valid” (p. 22).

Hebdige (1979) cites Hawkes’s (1977) clarification of Levi-Strauss’s original anthropological definition of bricolage:

[Bricolage] refers to the means by which the non-literate, non-technical mind of so-called ‘primitive’ man responds to the world around him [sic]. The process involves a ‘science of the concrete’ (as opposed to our ‘civilised’ science of the ‘abstract’) which far from lacking logic, in fact carefully and precisely orders, classifies and arranges into structures the *minutiae* of the physical world in all their profusion by means of a ‘logic’ which is not our own. The structures, ‘improvised’ or made up (these are rough translations of the process of *bricoler*) as *ad hoc* responses to an environment, then serve to establish homologies and analogies between the ordering of nature and that of society, and so satisfactorily ‘explain’ the world and make it able to be lived in. (p. 51)

One of Levi-Strauss’s own characterizations of bricolage is that the bricoleur is engaged in a process of “continual reconstruction from the same materials, it is always earlier ends which are called upon to play the part of means: the signified

changes into the signifying and vice versa” (p. 21).

With the exception of any dichotomous distinction between the “civilized” engineer and the “primitive” bricoleur, the initial anthropological characterization of bricolage by Levi-Strauss has weathered postmodern and post-structuralist critiques of structuralist thought. A post-structuralist scholar, however, might argue that an engineer acts at times like a bricoleur and a bricoleur acts at times like an engineer, thus blurring the dichotomy between the two (L. Grossberg, personal communication, December 4, 1996; Weinstein & Weinstein, 1993). Dick Hebdige (1979) used the notions of bricolage/bricoleur to explain how subcultural styles, such as British punk, are constructed.

Additionally, Michel de Certeau (1984) includes bricolage in his discussion of the practices of everyday creativity, specifically “cultural poaching”: “... users make (*bricolent*) innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules” (p. xiv). Hebdige (1979) called attention to the richness of bricolage, noting that systems of meaning “are capable of infinite extension because basic elements can be used in a variety of improvised combinations to generate new meanings within them” (p. 103). The bricoleur “works and plays with the stock” of materials provided by the culture – the bricoleur’s “parts are not standardized or invented; they are appropriated for new uses” (Weinstein & Weinstein, 1993, p. 64).

In his article, “Between Spearheads: *Bricolage* and Relationships,” Richard Conville (1997) applies bricolage/bricoleur to relational communication and examines bricolage and bricoleur through three different literary examples. These three examples illustrate the bricoleur as “relationship maker,” the mundane nature of bricolage, and the bricoleur as “storyteller.” Along with others (e.g., Berger & Kellner, 1964; Dixson & Duck, 1993; Duck, 1994; Gergen, 1988; Shotter, 1992; Wood, 1992, 1995, 1996), Conville argues that relationships come into being and are sustained through discourse and what we know about relationships we learn through discourse. Furthermore, through this everyday discourse, a person-in-relationship “draws upon mundane materials in *ad hoc*

fashion and depends on the likes of chance, memory and vigilance to construct relationship stories” (Conville, 1997, p. 21). This quote highlights three facets of bricolage/bricoleur that I will elaborate using Conville’s examples.

Prior to presenting Conville’s examples, however, it is important to note that Conville (1997) uses the term bricolage in diverse ways within his article and differently than Levi-Strauss (1966) and Hebdige (1979)³. Levi-Strauss and Hebdige use bricolage to refer to a process of assembling materials that have no obvious structure or pre-ordained purpose. Conville uses such phrases as “role of the bricoleur” to refer to this same process of assembling materials. Conville reserves the use of the term bricolage to indicate specifically the raw materials upon which bricoleurs draw; Levi-Strauss and Hebdige simply referred to symbolic and material resources as materials or resources. Further, it is important to note a tension within Conville’s article regarding the language used to describe bricolage. At one time, Conville characterizes bricolage as raw materials that could be individual elements: “... we are reflecting on a significant event or memorable person, and finding there a resource for defining and redefining a relationship” (p. 20). At other times, Conville describes bricolage as a collective totality that bricoleurs carry around with them from one relationship to another: “ ... falling back on our immediately available and often serendipitous store of materials for conducting interpersonal communication (what we know and what we can do): *bricolage*” (p. 12).

This tension, however, is generative when understood with the analogy of gumbo as bricolage⁴. Gumbo is a cajun dish made up of various individual ingredients: shrimp, sausage, okra, etc. It would not be accurate to say that shrimp is gumbo, or sausage is gumbo; gumbo only comes into being when all of the ingredients are combined together. If there are different ingredients substituted, then the gumbo will be different. At the same time, if someone were to ask “What are the ingredients used to make gumbo?” it is helpful to list

³ I am indebted to Lawrence Grossberg for clarifying this point.

⁴ Thanks to D. Soyini Madison for making this gumbo analogy.

the individual ingredients. Rather than an either/or approach to Conville's two views on bricolage (bricolage as individual elements and bricolage as a collective totality), a both/and approach seems more generative. That is, it may be helpful to say that 'x' relational experience is an element of one's bricolage as long as it is understood that any one "element/ingredient" can only be talked about as bricolage when it is understood within the context of multiple elements taken together as an interdependent totality.

With the exception of referencing Conville's article, however, I will use bricolage, following Levi-Strauss and Hebdige, to refer to a process of assembling raw materials, distinct from the approach an engineer employs; and, as Conville does, use bricoleur to refer to a person or group of people who work with symbolic and material resources in an improvisational manner. I make this choice because I feel bricolage refers more to a manner, or way, that people approach the use of symbolic and material resources, rather than the actual resources themselves. An engineer also draws upon symbolic and material resources, but the engineer approaches the resources with a specific, pre-ordained purpose for the materials, or invents new materials for her or his specific end. The abstract, pre-set plan determines what materials will be used, as distinct from the bricoleur drawing on whatever materials are in the immediate area and figuring out the structure along the way. The following examples from Conville's article, however, use bricolage to refer to the raw materials upon which bricoleurs draw.

Conville's first example of bricolage/bricoleur reveals the drama of relating. He draws on the writer, James Agee, as an example of a person-in-relation who was caught in an unanticipated and unprecedented situation that demanded a novel, improvisational response, amidst the stares of others as if "between spearheads." Agee was at a loss for how to respond in this situation; he was required to "perform in a relationship" (p. 10). Conville explains that this "type of episode is one in which we are obliged to act as bricoleurs, i.e., by falling back on our immediately available and often serendipitous store of materials for conducting interpersonal communication (what we know and what we do):

bricolage” (p. 12).

Conville’s second literary example explicates the pedestrian nature of bricolage and identifies everyday life experience as a context and content of bricolage. In his autobiography, Russell Baker (1982) reflected on correspondence with his mother during World War II. In his letters, Baker recounted the daily, mundane events in his life as a way to sustain their relationship. The ordinary experiences that were readily at hand -- the bricolage -- were drawn upon by Baker, acting as a bricoleur, to craft a connection with his mother despite the physical distance that separated them. Distinct from the exigence of the moment in Agee’s situation (episode type), Baker’s account spanned long periods of time and “present[s] a particular kind of episode, not uncommon, in which continued contact is vital to the relationship...” (Conville, 1997, p. 16).

Conville’s third literary example illustrates the bricoleur as “storyteller.” It differs from the first two examples because it shows that the work of the bricoleur can extend over a lifetime and that it can be a matter of life and death. The example centers on writer, Eudora Welty, and her parents. Welty provides an account of her father’s death in which her mother had attempted unsuccessfully to save her father’s life via a blood transfusion. For over thirty years, Welty’s mother blamed herself for her husband’s death. Her mother’s unsuccessful attempt to save her father’s life serves as a significant event that is reflected upon by Welty over and over again as a way of constructing her life story in relation to her mother. Conville argues that this episode type is one where persons-in-relationships “are reflecting on a significant event or memorable person, and finding there a resource for defining and redefining a relationship” (p. 20).

This example also illustrates the dialectical relationship between relaters and relationships (Wood, 1982). When persons-in-relationships reflect on significant events or people, it is not only the relationships that are changed or (re)defined, but also the people themselves. The following analogy helps to (re)articulate this point. When I re-read a book, I often have the experience of noticing different

aspects than I did in prior readings. One reason that I notice different aspects of the book, and not others, is due to new experiences that lead me to (re)interpret the book in novel ways. This book analogy suggests that when people reflect on past experiences (re-read the book), both relationships (the book and what it means to the reader) and relaters (the reader of the book) are (re)defined in the process.

Drawing on another example from Welty's book, Conville highlights five characteristics of bricolage/bricoleur. The first three are that the *bricoleur's* work depends on chance (that is, that people stumble upon ways of constructing life stories that make sense to them in particular moments); on memory and the passage of time; and the attentiveness of the bricoleur (that is, events, experiences, and so forth need to be recognized as potential resources so that they can be appropriated to redefine a relationship). The fourth characteristic is that the utility of the leftovers that are lying about and readily available may be questioned at first, but may later reveal their value (that is, an experience that may seem insignificant or irrelevant at first may later be seen as a useful resource to draw upon). Fifth, Conville argues that the work of the bricoleur requires effort and one must learn to "work smart" and develop a heightened sense of the possibilities for various materials.

To conclude his article, Conville articulates four values of bricolage/bricoleur as a means of understanding relationships. The first value is that the notion of the bricoleur "calls attention to the centrality of process in relationships" (p. 22). Relationships do not just come about *ex nihilo*, nor are they self-sustaining. Rather, relationships are redefined over time through work on them -- the work of bricoleurs. Second, Conville argues that a primary source of bricolage is a "by-product of relational partners' lived experience" (p. 22). Just as sawing wood creates sawdust as a by-product that can later be used for other ends, past relationship experiences generate symbolic resources as by-products, which can be drawn upon later for the (re)creation of future relationships and/or redefinitions of past or current relationships. The symbolic nature of resources allows for unlimited use; that is, resources are not depleted when one draws

upon them. Resources can however take material form as well which can be depleted with use, although Conville did not discuss this in his article. For example, Hebdige (1979) illustrated how British punk subcultural members utilized safety pins to resist dominant cultural trends. Conville's point however is that even with material objects, it is the symbolic meanings attributed to the material object that can be continually refashioned. Third, bricolage can be seen at the level of the individual (for example, Agee's location "between spearheads"), the dyad (for example, relational partners creating joint narratives of shared relationship experiences), and larger social groupings (for example, the practices in organizations that construct an organizational culture). Fourth, one's bricolage is like a "bag of tricks" that may be carried from one relationship experience to others.

Thus far, I have discussed bricolage as a process of constructing myths in "primitive" societies (Levi-Strauss's initial anthropological work), as appropriation of symbolic and material resources as acts of resistance to dominant cultural forces (de Certeau's "cultural poaching" and Hebdige's work with countercultures), and as the mundane materials drawn upon by the bricoleur in an *ad hoc* fashion which is dependent "on the likes of chance, memory and vigilance" in the construction of relationship stories. Two threads that run throughout all of these conceptions of bricolage/bricoleur are the notions of creativity and improvisation. To elaborate these continuous threads I now turn to the relational-dialectics perspective discussed by Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery in their book Relating: Dialogues and Dialectics.

Relational Dialectics

The relational-dialectics perspective offered by Baxter and Montgomery (1996) is guided by four central concepts that are common to all dialectical theorists. These are contradiction, change, praxis, and totality. Contradiction is viewed as inherent in social life and, through the dynamic interplay of opposition, contradiction drives change. Rather than conceptualizing binary

contradictions (such as A–B, openness–closedness), Baxter and Montgomery follow Bakhtin’s understanding of multivocality. That is, in any given A–B contradiction there are multiple radiants of meaning (A_1, A_2, \dots, A_n and B_1, B_2, \dots, B_n). Dialectical change is characterized as the ongoing, indeterminate “interplay of stability and flux” (p. 12). Praxis embodies the view that people are social actors and, simultaneously, objects of their own actions. The concept of totality presents the world as “a process of relations or interdependencies”; one phenomenon can only be understood in relation to other phenomena (p. 15). This totality, however, is not necessarily harmonious, but is constituted by multiple, and often conflicting voices.

Baxter and Montgomery's relational-dialectics variant of the general dialectical perspective is committed to a multivocal, dialogic understanding of relationships and individuals as social entities "constructed in the ongoing interplay of unity and difference" (p. 47). Accordingly, relationships and individuals are in a process of becoming, ongoing and continuous, never remaining static. Relationships are not static containers within which two individual, autonomous beings exist (Duck, West, & Acitelli, 1997). Rather, relating is situated at the nexus of multiple dialogues. Drawing on Bakhtin's work on the utterance, these dialogues include: the distant already-spoken with the expressed utterance of the present; the immediately prior utterances with the present utterance; the present utterance with the anticipated response of the listener; the present utterance with the anticipated response of the generalized superaddressee -- the superaddressee, similar to Mead's (1934) generalized other, refers to "a generalized set of normative expectations that lie beyond the immediate situation" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 28). In addition to these four dialogues, the dynamic interplay of unity and difference is realized at the moment of an utterance.

The coordination of these multiple voices requires improvisation, similar to that required in a jazz ensemble. Multiple musicians come together and, in an indeterminate and ongoing fashion, "join in the simultaneous play of 'the already existing' with the 'new and unrepeatable'" (p. 131). In a similar way that an interlocutor is informed by the multiple "voices" of past utterances and the anticipated response of the listener and superaddressee, bricoleurs draw on the raw materials left over (the already existing) as these are viewed in relation to the project at hand (the new and unrepeatable). The already existing provides the resources to improvise the new and unrepeatable which, in turn, flows into another pattern of the already existing. This continuous movement back and forth between the new and unrepeatable and the already existing exemplify the processual nature of relating and the concept of relationship flow.

The related notions of the superaddressee and Mead's (1934) symbolic interactionism further illuminate the social nature of the "already existing" and

the “new and unrepeatable.” Mead is helpful here because he identified interconnections among mind, self, and society. Mind is the ability to use significant symbols that are meaningful to a whole social community. According to Mead, society pre-exists the individual and the self is formed through communication with others in that society; this is “how society gets into an individual.” The self, Mead argues, is made up of two complementary processes, the “I” and the “me.” The me and the I work together in a dialectical relationship to one another; the me is a social monitor that analyzes and evaluates behavior, whereas the I is that aspect of self that is novel, that gives a sense of freedom and initiative. Mead (1934) writes, “the attitudes of the others which one assumes as affecting his [or her] own conduct constitute the ‘me,’ and that is something that is there, but the response to it is as yet not given” (176). As I appropriate this passage from Mead’s work, the me refers to that part of the self that is already existing while the I refers to that part that is not yet discovered and whose actions may be unanticipated. At a fundamental level there is a creative, generative tension between that which is already existing and that which is novel, between the me and the I, between that which is (being) and that which could be (becoming).

Following Mead’s analysis of relationships between the individual and society, Julia Wood drew on the basic tenets of symbolic interactionism to theorize the nexus of individuals, created in interaction through the significant symbols of a particular society, and the relational dyad. In her germinal discussion of relational culture, Wood (1982) looked at the “privately transacted system of understandings that coordinate attitudes, actions and identities of participants in a relationship” (p. 76). As the individuals in a given relationship sculpt their unique definitions of relational culture, the culture they create acts back upon them, therefore, and must be understood dialectically. Relationship cultures establish ever-fluctuating definitional boundaries that serve to enable certain types of experiences while limiting others (Wood, 1982).

Extending the discussion of relational culture, Fitch (1995) directed attention to junctures between the relational dyad and larger communal culture. She cited

both de Certeau's (1984) suggestion that "cultural members appropriate resources, both symbolic and material, to create identities and otherwise carry on everyday business" and Baxter's (1993) extension of this poaching metaphor, that relaters engage in "tactical uses of cultural templates of relating (such as 'love,' 'commitment,' 'intimacy,' and playful transformation of cultural forms)" to construct unique relational identities (Fitch, 1995, p. 13). Fitch explained how cultural resources are commandeered in the creation of a particular relational definition: "When a song takes on relational significance for a couple, it is a communicative resource appropriated (in de Certeau's [1984] words, 'poached') from the culture and put to the creative/symbolic use of evoking their shared history and unique bond. In a sense, the cultural becomes personal" (Fitch, 1995, p. 11). Fitch argued that there may exist limited cultural patterns for how members define relational culture and that, in form, relational culture may not be as unique to the particular dyad as was previously theorized. In support of this argument, Fitch cited research on "marital types": "The variations worked out by couples are therefore not unique to them, but reflect a limited number of possible orientations to common issues and definitional parameters within marriage (such as self-disclosure, expression of affection, interdependence, and gender roles)" (p. 17).

Enmeshed in the discursive realm, the symbolic resources, and the meanings attributed to material resources, that relaters draw upon are thoroughly social and change as relaters interact with larger cultural trends and as those trends are affected by individual and collective actions. For example, personal relationship researchers (Prusank, Duran, & DeLillo, 1993) argued that a new vision of personal relationships, which they labeled Vision III, has emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s from popular women's magazines that stress equality, the importance of relationship knowledge to sustaining relationships, and the mutual interdependence of people in relationships. This Vision III is distinct from previous visions. Vision I which prevailed in the 1950s and 1960s, emphasized, among other things, taking care of one's relational partner, while Vision II which dominated in the 1960s and 1970s stressed vigorously taking care

of one's self.

By focusing on the nexus of the relational dyad and larger culture, it becomes clearer how persons-in-relationships act as bricoleurs when appropriating symbolic and material resources in the process of (re)defining and thus (re)creating their personal relationships. Relational definitions (or "relationships") evolve over time, in part, due to the tension of the already existing and the new and unrepeatable. At one time and place, ways of relating may be novel, but subsequently some become patterned and taken-for-granted. As by-products of these ways of relating, materials become available in the service of the creation of new ways of relating. This motion of relating is continuous and always, already unfinished.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented three primary terms -- creation, process, and definition -- as a useful framework to understand the bricolage/bricoleur perspective. I next reviewed an abridged intellectual tradition of bricolage from Levi-Strauss's original anthropological understandings through popular culture analysis and into personal relationship research. Then, through the lens of the relational-dialectics perspective, I discussed creativity and improvisation as prominent themes embodied by the bricolage perspective. In the next chapter I will explain the methodology I employed to study how relaters act as bricoleurs to define and create their personal relationships.

Existing In the Eyes of Others

“... for unless we exist in the eyes of others, we may come to doubt even our own existence.”

– Barbara Meyerhoff

In my discussion of Conville’s work on bricolage in Chapter 2, I noted that he relied on literary character’s narratives to demonstrate the work of the bricoleur. Rather than focusing on literary characters as a source of data, my study focused on the personal narratives of actual persons-in-relationships. This focus required an alternative to the methodological approach employed by Conville. The particular avenue I took involved a collage of qualitative methods, including personal narratives, in-depth interviews, conversations, and shared experiences. In this chapter, I briefly discuss qualitative research approaches in general; explain the two month interview process, including how I selected and contacted participants; present biographies for each of my three participants; and describe my method of interpretive analysis.

Qualitative Study

In her work with elderly Jewish people, Barbara Meyerhoff (1978) illustrated how these Eastern European migrants create a sense of continuity and identity after being abandoned by their progeny and living amidst a culture that marginalizes their experiences. Meyerhoff invokes the bricolage perspective to detail how these people weave meaningful coherence into their lives by improvising new meanings and definitions for traditional Sabbath ceremonies and secular holidays. Meyerhoff situated her work within a rich tradition of qualitative approaches that privileges a view of

subjects as:

active participants in their own history [who] provide their own sharp, insistent definitions of themselves and explanations for their destiny, past and future. They are then knowing actors in a historical drama they script, rather than subjects in someone else's study. They 'make' themselves, sometimes even 'make themselves up'... (p. 100).

In general, qualitative approaches to the study of personal relationships strive for what Bakhtin calls "depth of insight" rather than "accuracy of knowledge" (Todorov, 1984). Bakhtin argued that "the object of the human sciences is *expressive* and *speaking being*. Such a being never coincides with itself, that is why it is inexhaustible in its meaning and signification" (p. 24). Under the broad rubric of qualitative approaches is a personal narrative approach that captures the multiple expressions of speaking beings.

Personal narratives enjoy a rich tradition in qualitative work among various disciplines, from literary studies to anthropology to folklore (Langellier, 1989). Within communication studies, Walter Fisher advanced a narrative theory that argued humans are essentially storytelling animals (Fisher, 1987; Wood, 1997). That is, people make sense of their lives by crafting compelling narratives from both mundane and extraordinary events. Specific to my study, a personal narrative approach offered simultaneously (1) an opportunity for participants to construct and present coherent identities as they narrated their relationship experiences, (2) a fertile resource to analyze whether participants drew on symbolic and material resources to create their personal relationships, and (3) insight into how they accomplished this, if they did.

The use of personal narratives as a means of learning about relating raises the problematic issue of experience. As I use the term in this study, experience, understood in two senses, refers to how people name the behaviors and events of their lives (Hall, 1980). As I discussed in Chapter 2, the world is continually in flux (experience one, or "objective" experience), and people make sense of this world through definitions (experience two, or "subjective" experience). Defining the "objective" world suspends the continuous motion allowing people to have

“subjective” experiences. As Burke argued, what is named, or defined, does not exhaust all the possibilities of what can be named or defined (definitions select and deflect certain aspects of the world). Burke’s argument explains Bakhtin’s statement above that the named experiences of an expressive being (experience two) never coincides with all that it experiences (experience one).

Process of Methodological Approach

As noted in Chapter 1, I conducted in-depth interviews and conversations and I shared experiences with three participants who identified themselves as bisexual or gay. I solicited participants through a snowball sampling technique. That is, I asked friends of mine who identified themselves as bisexual/queer to refer me to other people in the bisexual/queer community who might be interested in participating in my study. Through snowball sampling I contacted my first two participants. I contacted my third participant through a community gay, lesbian, and bisexual organization.

My approach operated on two distinct, yet related, levels. First, I asked participants to narrate their own stories of personal relationships. I then examined transcriptions⁵ of these narratives to see whether participants acted as bricoleurs. Second, throughout the course of the two-month study, the participants and I were establishing relationships ourselves. Operating at this second level allowed me as a researcher to become self-reflexive about my own involvement in this study and to narrate my own stories of relating with my participants. Continuing in the scholarly tradition that recognizes researchers as legitimate “objects/subjects of study” (Borland, 1991; Crawford, 1996; Wood & Duck, 1995), I analyzed my own activity as a bricoleur. I will now discuss the format I followed for the two months of interactions with each of my participants.

⁵ I do not include the transcripts of the interviews or my field notes as appendices since doing so either would require heavy camouflaging, in which case they would not be accurate texts, or risk of violating participants’ confidentiality, which is ethically unacceptable.

I met with each participant six times over a two-month period. I staggered the times that I met with participants so that just as I was concluding the two-month sequence with one participant I was starting the process with another participant. After I made contact with participants and had an initial phone conversation with them to determine their interest in my study, we met one-on-one in a public place, such as a coffee house, to discuss the specifics of this study and to read and sign the participant consent form. Following this, I asked each participant to tell me about the people who were important to her or him. The purposes of this were to get both of us accustomed to working with a tape recorder, to get a feel for what the nature of the interviews would be like, and to have a point of departure for our subsequent meetings. The first meeting with each participant lasted a little over an hour.

At the start of our second meeting I asked each participant to give me a sense of her or his background including where she or he was born and had lived, and her or his personal interests, family, etc. Then I asked participants to tell me about each of the people they mentioned at the end of our first meeting. Both the second and third meetings included personal narratives about those people who were personally significant to the participants. Both of these meetings, which were recorded on audio tape, lasted between one and two hours and took place in more private sections of coffee shops (in the case of two participants) and in a study room in a campus library (in the case of the third participant).

Our fourth meeting involved a “shared experience” with each other which meant the two of us would engage in some type of activity, such as going out to dinner, or to a movie, or both. The nature of our interaction was far less structured, more informal, and more conversational. I did not bring along a tape recorder, but did record field notes at the end of our time together. In the case of one participant, Sandy, we went out to dinner during our fourth meeting and then to a movie our fifth meeting. The purpose of these “shared experiences” was to give us a chance to become more comfortable with each other, learn about each other outside the context of an interview situation, and provide

experiences for me to reflect on and analyze in terms of creating our own ways of relating.

The fifth meeting (with the exception of Sandy) was another interview, lasting between one and two hours, in which I asked the participants to make connections among their various relationships experiences. For example, one question I asked was, “How do you feel your relationship with ‘x’ affects your other relationships?” These sessions tended to be more interactive since I asked more questions than in sessions two and three; in those two sessions I only asked questions to “move along” their personal narratives.

The sixth meeting served as a “closure” meeting. That is, I asked my participants if they had any more information or stories that they would like to talk about and if they wanted to ask me any questions about the study or myself (for example, one participant asked me what my personal motivations were for this study). Additionally, during this meeting we discussed reviewing the transcripts of our interviews so that each participant could add, change, or delete any information from the transcripts that she or he did not want to be included in any formal write-ups for my thesis.

Katherine Borland (1991) illustrates the importance of showing transcripts of interviews to participants and checking researchers’ interpretations with the participants’ interpretations. In oral narrative research, Borland asserts, there may be conflicting interpretations and, if so, these should be identified and explored. Borland argues that this approach views participants as collaborators in the research process, may contribute to new ways of understanding material to both researchers and participants, and provides a check so that researchers do not simply analyze data that confirms prior predispositions.

After this sixth meeting, further contact between me and my participants was through phone conversations or mail. For example, we would discuss any modifications to the original transcripts and how each participant would be represented in the formal write-up of my thesis.

To conclude, this two month process of personal narratives, conversations, and shared experiences provides a context similar to Meyerhoff’s (1987)

discussion of definitional ceremonies where participants are offered an opportunity to sculpt their own identities and to construct meaningful stories of their personal relationships by authoring their own distinct personal narratives. The next section of this chapter presents biographies for each participant and explains how I analyzed the data generated by the personal narratives, conversations, and shared experiences discussed above.

Participant Biographies

To provide a more thorough understanding of this two-month research process and to introduce each of my three participants, Sandy, Adrian, and Sebastian⁶, I will present brief biographies and summaries of our interactions.

Sandy

Sandy is an Asian-American female in her early-twenties who recently graduated from college. She was born in the Midwest and moved to the South prior to her teenage years. Sandy was raised in the Catholic faith and it has been only within the past year that she chose to identify herself as bisexual. She is not out to her parents and actively conceals her bisexual identity from them. Remarking on her bisexual identity, Sandy stated that “I like being in the middle, because I can hedge. Choose either way.” Sandy is playful about her relationships and life’s contradictions, and, although she sometimes journals, she does not stop to “think about my [Sandy’s] philosophies [of relationships] very much. I just kinda go along. I think I have them, but I never thought about it, you know. Well I have thought about it, ‘cause I know what I’ve written down.”

I was introduced to Sandy through a friend of mine at a social event sponsored by a community organization focusing on issues of sexual orientation. Our first meeting was at a coffee shop where we reviewed the consent form and

⁶ All names mentioned are pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of participants.

discussed the significant people in her life. For our second and third meetings, we again met at the same coffee shop where she told stories about her dating relationships and friendships. We went to dinner for our fourth meeting at a restaurant of her choice. On our fifth meeting, we went to see the movie Bound that was described by a newspaper article posted outside the movie theater as an action movie with a “lesbian twist.” After the movie, we went to a pizza shop for dinner and conversation about the movie and the reservations and complications resulting from her recent decision to take a new job and move back home with her parents. Our sixth meeting took place in a library study room where our two hour talk provided a sense of closure to our two months of interviews and conversations. Subsequent interactions were conducted over the phone regarding interpretation of the interview transcripts and representation in this thesis write-up.

Adrian

Adrian is a Caucasian woman in her late-twenties who grew up in a rural, Southern town. She identifies herself as gay because she does not like the negative connotations of the term lesbian. Adrian was involved in one significant long-term dating relationship, maintains a small, but tight, circle of friends, and is very close to her family, although she is not out to them. At one point in her life she resolved never to tell her family about her sexual orientation saying that “I’d [Adrian] take it to the grave with me” although she can now envision a day when she would discuss this with them.

I would characterize Adrian as articulate and insightful, yet reserved and soft-spoken. I knew Adrian only casually prior to my calling her on the phone to ask if she would like to participate in my thesis project. For our first meeting, Adrian and I met in a coffee shop to review the consent form and discuss the significant people in her life. For our second and third meetings we went to a different coffee shop that was more centrally located between us to discuss her primary dating relationship with Marcia and her close circle of friends. Our

fourth interaction was over dinner where we enjoyed a pleasant conversation spanning topics of my thesis project, our respective families, and plans for the upcoming break. We met for a fifth time in a restaurant as a closure conversation. We did not meet for a sixth time because we felt we had covered everything that needed to be talked about, but we did meet again to review interview transcripts.

Sebastian

I saw Sebastian at a panel presentation sponsored by a community organization that focuses on issues of sexual orientation. I obtained his phone number through a friend of mine and asked Sebastian if he would like to be involved in my thesis project. He is in his early-twenties and of Mediterranean descent. He is currently taking classes towards his undergraduate degree. He identifies himself as gay and has been out since entering college, although lately he seems to be “nosediving” back into the closet such that “... I [Sebastian] stand with the closet door open, looking out.” His family is very supportive of his sexual identity, especially because his mother is lesbian, although he did not learn of his mother’s sexual orientation until he was 18. His mother never spoke positively or negatively about homosexuality; one’s sexual orientation was a personal decision. I would characterize Sebastian as a person who is highly self-aware and deliberate regarding how he relates with others. For example, after our first meeting where we reviewed the consent form and briefly discussed the significant people in his life, he said that the answer to all my questions was easy: “... I rebelled against my parents. I had a couple of dismal relationships, and as a result of that, I became closer to my family. And distant from everyone else.”

We continued to meet in a library study room for our second, third, and fourth meetings where he chronologically traced his personal relationships from high school to the present. Our fifth meeting was also in a library study room, but was more interactive in nature. That is, for his chronological narrations I remained silent only interrupting to clarify what he was saying. I reserved most of my questions from the three previous meetings until the fifth meeting where we talked back and forth about his stories. For our sixth meeting we went out to dinner and conversed freely about relationships and hobbies, ending in a playful dispute regarding conflicting philosophies on how to read the maxims of fortune cookies. Further interactions regarding reviewing the transcripts took place over the phone or in person.

In the next section I discuss my method of interpretive analysis for my

interactions with Sandy, Adrian, and Sebastian.

Method of Analysis

My method of analyzing the interview transcripts and field notes of shared experiences and conversations flows directly from bricolage as an analytic lens. In their creative efforts, bricoleurs are social actors who are attentive to and draw upon the resources in their environment (see p. 28 for characteristics of the bricoleur). Bricolage as an analytic perspective represents a point of intersection between two established intellectual traditions, phenomenology and hermeneutics (Watson & Watson-Franke, 1985). Although there are substantial criticisms of both phenomenology and hermeneutics, and even inconsistencies between them, I present those aspects that converge with the bricolage perspective and my method of analysis.

A phenomenological perspective, according to Husserl (1931), takes as its starting point the perspective of the conscious human being who lives in a world that she or he constructs through a process of perception and interpretation. Husserl argued that humans live naturally and spontaneously while going about their everyday lives and generally accept this world as given, taken-for-granted. That is, people generally believe that their everyday life as experienced is actually “out there” and rarely challenge its taken-for-granted status. At various times, however, humans engage in self-reflection where their everyday activities are not seen as given, but rather intended as given. That is, the person sees how she or he is complicit with activity in the life world and is an active participant who sustains her beliefs that make up consciousness in her or his world (Watson & Watson-Franke, 1985).

Gadamer (1975) developed a hermeneutic point of view that reflects a dialectical process between the interpreter and the text. The texts for my project were participants’ personal narratives and my field notes. Gadamer explained that there is a continuous process of dialogical questioning between the interpreter and text. That is, the interpreter comes to the text with certain

questions which are continually refined based on how the text reveals itself and poses its own questions to the interpreter (Watson & Watson-Franke, 1985). For Gadamer, true understanding of the nature of the text is never fully achieved, or achievable. Rather, the aim of hermeneutics is “to clarify the conditions in which understanding takes place” (Gadamer, 1975, p. 263).

One primary question I asked of my transcripts and field notes was whether they presented evidence that my participants and I acted as bricoleurs who drew upon materials to create personal relationships. That is, is the bricolage/bricoleur perspective helpful in understanding how people create their personal relationships? Equally important was the question of whether the transcripts and field notes provided evidence that people do not act as bricoleurs and whether the bricolage/bricoleur perspective is not helpful to understand this creative process of relating? Subordinate questions that I asked include: What are examples of bricolage as they reveal themselves in the participants’ personal narratives? What are the sources of the symbolic and material resources? What functions do the symbolic and material resources serve in individuals efforts to make sense of themselves and their relationships?

To answer these questions I read the interview transcripts and my field notes multiple times, often while listening to the audio-taped recordings. On my first reading, I noted instances where each participant drew on symbolic and material resources in their personal narratives. On my second reading of the transcripts and field notes, I looked for themes that recurred throughout the narratives. For my third reading, I recorded places where participants acted as bricoleurs, as engineers, and places where there was not enough information to determine how a participant drew on resources. Additionally, I noted examples that problematized any rigid dichotomy between bricoleur and engineer activity. For a fourth reading I noted the multiple social sites where participants drew on resources. These social sites include families, relational dyads, work environments, and social communities.

My analysis revealed three different themes that illustrate ways participants draw on symbolic and material resources. I grouped these inductively derived

themes into broad categories to show how participants performed as bricoleurs and engineers. These themes are performing/disguising identity; (re)creating relationships; and sense-making. The themes bleed into one another and thus overlap. For example, Sandy made sense of her parents' negative responses to homosexuality and this contributed to her decision to disguise her bisexual identity from them. I do not advance these as the themes or activities of bricoleurs. Rather, they are useful constructions that emerged at the time of my analysis as one way to organize and make sense of the numerous instances of bricoleurs at work.

Summary

In this section I explained the interpretive process I employed to analyze my participants' personal narratives and my own field notes by drawing on phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches. Prior to this, I discussed qualitative research approaches, specifically the use of personal narratives, explained the process of the two month interview format with my three participants, and presented biographies for each participant. In the next chapter I will present a narrative account of how participants drew upon symbolic and material resources in multiple social sites.

Bricoleurs At Work

In Chapter 3, I discussed the personal narrative approach that I employed to better understand how people, acting as bricoleurs, creatively draw on symbolic and material resources to sculpt personal relationships. Personal narratives, as discussed at length in Chapter 3, are stories that people create to make sense of their lives by drawing on both mundane and extraordinary phenomena. Based on my analysis of our in-depth interviews, conversations, and shared experiences with three participants in this project, I noted examples of how participants drew on symbolic and material resources to act as bricoleurs or engineers within and among multiple social sites. These social sites include families, relational dyads, work environments, and social communities. Remembering the call issued by Duck, West, and Acitelli (1997, p. 19) to focus on “what people are actually *doing* in relationships,” I focused on how participants performed as bricoleurs.

My concentration on how participants worked with raw materials within their personal narratives allowed me to draw on participants’ stories and my field notes, constructing my own interpretation along the way, thus performing as a bricoleur myself. Although the bits and pieces were taken verbatim from the interview transcripts (with the exception of minor grammatical editing for ease of reading), the excerpts that compose each narrative did not necessarily follow in the sequential order in which I present them. The excerpts were taken from within larger narratives that spanned six different meetings. To ensure that these narrative episodes are representative of the larger narratives and fair to the participants’ relationship stories, I asked each participant to edit the narrative episode that I constructed for her or him.

My interpretations revealed three different themes that illustrate ways participants draw on symbolic and material resources. These inductively derived themes reveal how participants performed as bricoleurs in broad categories. Throughout the flowing narrative of this chapter I stop along the way to analyze the narrative episodes and to illustrate examples of how participants acted as bricoleurs and engineers and to problematize rigid dichotomies between the two.

Bricoleurs Working Narrative Style

From texts, I derived three broad categories, or themes, that illustrate participants working with symbolic and material resources: performing/disguising identity; (re)creating relationships; and sense-making. Each theme contains excerpts drawn from the participants' narratives (indicated by italics) and from my field notes (indicated by SMALL CAPS).

Performing/disguising sexual identities

It's all sort of an act you're playing, but I mean, it's necessary. You can't -- everyone can't have a job in a coffee house where they can do whatever they want and be just like they are around their friends. I don't know.

– Sandy

The first theme I identified is performing/disguising sexual identities. I illustrate this with Sandy's narrative about her efforts to disguise her bisexual identity from her parents.

Well, when I was dating a girl my senior year of college, I told them [Sandy's parents] and they freaked out and it was a thing and ever since then we haven't really gotten along the same way. But um, when I started dating Darnell, actually that was what helped it and now, ever since then, we've been pretty good. Because they think I'm back to normal. So, anything that goes against that I don't talk about because it will make them upset. And it's not really worth it.

I think it was hard to figure out what was really true, because my parents really didn't want me to like women. So I started getting doubts and thinking about well, you know, is this really me, or is this like something I'm going through, or just my friends.

And like my parents said, "You dated guys in high school and you used to have long hair." That's what my Mom's always saying, "You used to have long hair." As if that would make a difference, I don't know. And I started wondering if they were right. But I thought it really didn't matter, why things happen or if they don't, if I just kinda go with the flow instead of trying to find a beginning and an end point of where things happened. I think that I find women attractive, and I don't know why, or if it's always been true. I don't know. I think there's been certain things when I was little that maybe, but I never really thought about it. I mean I never really, really knew when I was little, or anything like that.

But it was just hard, because I was at home and she [Sandy's girlfriend at the time] would call once in a while, and my Mom would say, "Oh Katrina's on the phone. Who is that?" You know. Cause I'd never mentioned a Katrina before. And I'm trying to explain who she is with -- this 26 year old woman that I met and she works, you know, you don't meet that just around school. So, "Oh, she's a girl in my class." You know. And they don't ask too many questions, so they took that, I guess. It was nerve-racking for me to think what if they found out, or what if this or that.

I have to call them every week and that's one of those things. We talk every week my parents. I had to talk with them tonight, just kind of saying "Hey, nothing's new." That's one of those things where you don't tell them anything of certain points of your life [about] what's going on because they don't really want to hear it.

I think my parents are the only people I really hide everything from. I don't tell them about things I do in my free time. Who I spend it with, for the most part, unless it's something -- If I do anything with a guy I tell them, because it'll -- "Oh, that's great! That's really nice!" And they'll think it's wonderful. They know I've had sex, but they don't know about sex I'm having [now], or anything like that.

I generally tell them about most people in my life. By changing the details. Like Tina. Explaining Tina. Well, it is true, but I met her through Brad. And Brad is a friend of hers, but they met in the gay youth group and I told them that they met in the computer lab. I don't know, things like that. Katrina at first was, what, 27 now, but she was 25 at the time, and working up in the biotechnology business. I said, "Oh yeah, she's in some class of mine." Something like that. "Oh yeah, they live in my hall." All these people I talk about. I don't say, "Oh yeah, I met them at the gay club." No, just class. I tell my parents I met them in one of my classes.

WHEN HER PARENTS FOUND OUT THAT SHE WAS DATING A WOMAN, THEY HAD HER COME HOME TO TALK ABOUT IT. AND SO HER MOM ASKS, SHE SAID, "SO, SANDY, HAVE YOU HAD SEX WITH A MAN?" AND SANDY REPLIES, "DO YOU REALLY WANT ME TO ANSWER THAT?" AND THEN APPARENTLY HER MOM ASKED ABOUT HAVING SEX WITH A WOMAN, AND SHE SAID THAT SHE NEVER VOLUNTEERS THE INFORMATION, BUT IF SHE'S ASKED, SHE'S GOING TO TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT IT. AND THEN THIS IS WHERE, IF SHE'S TAKEN BY SURPRISE OR SOMETHING, SHE'LL TELL THE TRUTH, BECAUSE SHE ADMITS SHE'S NOT A GOOD LIAR. SHE SAID IF THEY DON'T WANT TO KNOW THE TRUTH, THEN THEY SHOULDN'T ASK, CAUSE SHE'S GOING TO TELL IT TO THEM. AND SHE JUST DOESN'T WANT TO TRY TO HIDE ANY MORE, AND IT MAKES HER FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE TO HAVE TO DO THAT. SHE'S SAYING THAT -- REFERRING TO SEXUAL ORIENTATION -- THAT "IT'S PART OF WHO I AM," AND IF SHE WENT BACK HOME, SHE "COULDN'T BE TOTALLY ME."

Over two years ago Sandy's parents found out she was dating a woman and they "freaked." Her parents thought it was just a phase that Sandy was going through, but Sandy did not agree. Her parents were not willing to talk about it with her so Sandy just stopped telling them about it. At the time of my study, Sandy talked with her parents on the phone every week and they asked about Sandy's personal life, but they only wanted to hear about part of it, that part that conforms to their view of Sandy as "heterosexual."

Heterosexual norms for relating stipulate that a woman dates a man, and women are only friends with other women. Since her parents did not accept her dating relationships with women, Sandy maintained the relationship with her parents by changing the details of her personal life and highlighting her interactions with males so that her experiences conformed to the views her parents desire.

The above episode is an example of bricolage because Sandy assembled together a set of concrete practices available in her immediate environment (i.e., highlighting stories to her parents about her male friends, changing details about how she met her gay friends, not telling her parents about certain parts of her life) to disguise her sexual identity. Sandy was not following a carefully laid out plan containing abstract principles that guided her actions, but she acted in an improvisational manner, drawing on and subtly altering those concrete practices of relating in which she already engaged. A bricoleur, then, "makes do" with the available concrete resources at hand in order to fashion a particular relationship. The materials that are lying about shape the bricoleur's form and ways of relating.

Adrian, my second participant, also concealed her sexual identity from her parents. Here is a narrative episode based on excerpts from her personal narrative.

Her name is Dina. She's from my hometown. My parents know this girl. So I've asked about her before, because she's a lot older than me. I think she's 36. And I've asked them before if they knew her, cause they've written articles and things about her in the local newspaper, you know, back home. Cause she's a -- I think a psychologist now. She has a Ph.D. in something like that, counselling or something. But she's done very

well for herself. She's a really good person. But I've asked them just in conversation, did they know who that was. She's like, "Oh yeah, that's so-and-so's daughter, you know, blah, blah, blah." But I don't think they have a very high opinion of her, because they know that she's gay. So that was kind of frustrating to realize that, you know, that's just my assumption, but some things are pretty obvious. I mean because the girl has done no wrong, you know. I mean she's gone to school, she's made a name for herself, she's very -- actually she's a professor. And there's no reason why these people wouldn't like her, or like what she's done or anything like that. But they just don't have a very high opinion of her at all. And I just kinda feel like it's because they know, you know.

...of course they [Adrian's parents] don't know about me. They don't know that I'm gay. That's my choice. That's the way I choose for it to be right now. And they have never really been -- I say I'm really close to them, and I really am -- but there's a whole lot about me that they don't know. So I keep that certain distance from them, and I've always wondered why, you know. And there for a while I guess when I was about, probably about three or four years ago, they used to really pressure me about "Do you even date anybody? Do you see anybody? We don't hear you talk about anybody special or anything." And it just really got on my nerves. At the time I just had a lot going on. I was in school, and it's just like -- I don't need this. I talked to my Mom about it and told her, "Look, you know. I appreciate your concern and everything, but when there is someone, you'll be the first to know. Actually you'll be the second. But until that point, lay off." And she's done a really good job as far as backing off. So, it's not really come up since then, but I think, I don't know.

Marcia, who's the person that I used to be with, we were together for, we were together for like five years, but we lived together for almost seven. And I think the more time that goes by, the more that they're kind of realizing what may be actually going on. Even though they won't talk about it. So, I'm not going to bring it up. But I've changed a lot in the way that I think about that, because it used to be that I'd hold in, or I told other people that I'd die before they ever found out about that. I'd take it to the grave with me. They would never know. But I don't really feel that way anymore. I'm pretty much to the point that if they ask, I'll tell them. I haven't gotten to that point where I'm just gonna come right out and say, "Whether you want to know it or not, this is the way it is." But it's a process and it's -- I'm sure it's not that far away. Yeah, so they've pretty much stopped -- just don't talk about me seeing anyone.

I'm upset and uncomfortable with the fact that she [Adrian's mother] may not be happy with something that I'm doing, but it doesn't keep me from doing it, you know what I mean? Some people are different, some people will change their whole life just to be what their parents want them to be. Which is one of the bigger conflicts that I have with my ex [Marcia]. That's what she was doing. And I couldn't deal with that. I couldn't just be there whenever she wanted me to be, and then when her parents came around I was totally something different. So that's where a lot of our problems came from.

I mean, like Marcia, you know -- she used to take some of her guy friends home with her to portray as boyfriends. Even though some of them were gay. But her parents didn't know the difference. But she would do that. And I have never done that. I'll never start doing that. I don't ever want to give a -- well, I don't want to give them a false sense of security, you know what I mean? That yeah, this is the man I'm dating, and maybe we'll get married. I don't want to do that to them. So, they know that I've

pretty much never taken anybody home to meet them on that kind of level. So I don't think that they expect it like they used to. So I think that, I guess now they wouldn't be as surprised as they would have been before. It wouldn't, I don't think it would kill them now, but I think it would have before. So, I think we've both, well we've all grown a lot in the last six, seven years. Cause they had a hard time letting go of me, because I was the youngest. They still do, but they're better about it. My Mom was mad that I moved up here. She was very upset about it. I don't know. I think it's hard for them to admit to themselves that I am as independent as I am. You know, and I really, I need them to an extent, but not like they want to be needed, you know. But I also said, too, that I'll tell them if they ask. But see, there will come another step, where I'll just want to tell them, then they won't have to ask.

Adrian: She [Marcia, Adrian's ex-girlfriend] would take me home to her parents house, you know, things like that. Or we'd go visit for various reasons, not just to take me there to introduce me, but just for various reasons. Because they lived so close to my parents. So a lot of times we'd go for the day and we'd stop off with both. Because my parents really liked her and then her parents really liked me. So, you know, it was just all big one happy family. But that went on for I guess about two years.

Walter: Can, can I interrupt you for a second? When you went home to her place, how would you all -- how did you all act?

Adrian: As friends.

Walter: As friends.

Adrian: Never anything more. Still to this day. Of course she's a whole different story, cause when she was 18 she was still in high school, she was kind of seeing her best friend, which was a girl. They were at her parents' house and they were in her bedroom and her mother walked in. I mean they weren't doing anything major, but I think they were like kissing on the bed or something like that. And her mother walked in. And that has like scarred her for life, because it made her father physically ill. And he said things like, "You know you're killing me. Why are you doing this to me?" And even though that happened, they still don't know. It's very weird. I mean it's like they know, but they don't want to know. Or they're in serious denial, I don't know. They don't talk about it. It's like something that never happened. They just brushed it under the rug and went on. And, you know, told her she could never see her friend again. Of course they did, but --

So when Marcia and I got together, we spent a lot of our time with Tom and Richy (who are boyfriends). Like years. When we went on vacation, they went too. It was like it was always the foursome. Whenever you needed a date, like to a company function or something, that's who you took. And it was always paired off; it was Marcia and Richy and me and Tom. But they used to joke about that a lot. Marcia was going to marry Richy, and I was going to marry Tom. We were going to get this huge house and split it in half and they'd live in one side and we'd live in the other. And nobody would ever have to know. That was when I was much younger. It was a nice thought, but I

wouldn't do that.

Adrian: And I've always wondered, which he [Adrian's father] would disapprove of the most. If I married a black man, or if I was gay. I've always wondered about that. It's kind of a lose/lose situation, but, you know, it isn't that he had to choose one. I really don't know. That's where he's kinda hard to read. Now you can understand why they don't know. Cause, I mean, when they start throwing out threats at you like that --

Walter: What would happen if you went home with a black lesbian?

Adrian: Oh that would be interesting. I wouldn't -- they'd probably take my last name away from me or something. I don't think that -- and this is kinda sad to say -- but I know my father. But I do not think that he is emotionally stable enough to handle something like that. I really don't. I think that he would come to be an old bitter man and I'd guarantee that he'd never speak to me again. I just -- I don't think -- and he has a really big heart, he really does.

That's the one thing about my family, too, if they ever found out, I don't -- the last thing I ever want from them is to be tolerated. I don't want that from them. I'd rather them disown me and hate me for the rest of my life than to tolerate me, and let me be around. You know what I mean? I couldn't ever stand that. Cause I don't want that from anybody. I'd rather be alone for the rest of my life, than to think that people are doing me a favor by letting me be their friend. I'm kinda stubborn about things like that.

It's amazing how three children [Adrian and her two sisters] can grow up in the same household and turn out so differently. I've always been amazed at that. I think that's where they have a problem, too, the way that I turned out is because they look and think, "Why aren't you like these two? You know, these two are just identical. Why are you so far outfield?" No, they make it a point to tell me that they're proud of me, and that sort of thing. I believe that. But it's all, I think it's all conditional. It's all based on certain criteria. So if they had the whole picture, they wouldn't be telling me all those things.

The "whole picture" Adrian's parents did not have was about her sexual identity. Adrian has decided not to tell her family about being gay, even to lie outright to her sister when she directly asked Adrian, because she felt her parents could not handle it. Adrian doubted her parents could deal with the truth based on how they reacted to stories about gay people in the past. The foregoing narrative opened with such a story about a woman, Dina, who grew up in Adrian's neighborhood. When her mother heard this story, she had a negative reaction to it. Based on her mother's response to the story, and other similar responses to stories about gay people, Adrian decided not to tell her mom about her sexual orientation. This part of the episode represents an

example of “testing the waters,” that is, trying to figure out certain information by assessing people’s responses to stories about related situations. In this case, the story of the “neighborhood girl gone gay,” and her mother’s reaction to it, became a piece of information in Adrian’s personal experience upon which she drew to decide whether or not to tell her parents about her sexual orientation.

This “testing the waters” example also surfaced in Sandy’s narratives. In her case, Sandy was attentive to her parents’ response to *Birdcage*, a movie released to popular audiences with prominent gay themes. Based on her parents’ response to the movie, Sandy gained more information about how they felt about the gay community. Just as sawing a piece of wood generates the by-product of sawdust which can be used for other ends, Sandy’s and Adrian’s parents’ responses generated by-products that their daughter used to fashion relationships. Drawing on these by-products of lived experience, then, can shape choices not only of what to do and say, but also what not to do and say. That is, because Adrian’s parents had such a strong negative reaction to the story about Dina and to other similar stories, Adrian chose not to tell her parents about her sexual orientation.

In both of these examples, Sandy and Adrian drew on mundane experiences to fashion relationships with their parents. In both cases, their parents’ responses were minor, but concrete indications of their feelings about homosexuality. Collecting these and other minor threads of evidence informs a coherent portrayal of their parents’ views. Neither Sandy nor Adrian operated from an abstract formula to decide whether their parents might not be accepting of homosexuality, but they both intertwined mundane, concrete threads of evidence to improvise ways of relating with their parents. Furthermore, Sandy and Adrian did not work from abstract principles that led them to interpret their parents’ responses in a particular way, like an engineer might. Rather, Sandy and Adrian as bricoleurs recognized their parents’ response to the stories in their immediate environment and tucked it away with all the other threads of evidence that suggested ways to relate with their parents.

Adrian’s narrative also featured numerous examples of

performing/disguising sexual identity. For example, she and Marcia performed as friends for Marcia's parents during visits home, when they were really dating partners. Another way of stating this is that Adrian and Marcia performed heterosexuality for Marcia's parents. Marcia and Adrian also performed being straight when Adrian went to social events for her job. The normal routine for such company functions is to bring a heterosexual significant other. Drawing on this knowledge, they asked two of their gay male friends to accompany them to maintain their disguise. Another example in Adrian's narrative presented Marcia strategically bringing men home with her to ward off her parents' suspicion about her sexuality. Adrian used the story about Marcia bringing men home to decide that she would not do the same thing with her parents. This story generated for Adrian a by-product, information that was drawn on to guide her own relationships with her parents. Similar to, yet distinct from, the discussion of "testing the waters," Adrian drew on knowledge gleaned from observing another to guide her actions, specifically to decide what not to do.

These two narrative episodes illustrate how Sandy acted as a bricoleur by assembling materials in her immediate experience, in this case, concrete practices, to fashion a relationship with her parents. Additionally, I illustrated how Adrian drew upon resources, cultural scripts of heterosexuality, in order to disguise her sexual identity. I also provided examples of bricoleurs "testing the waters" and gaining knowledge about one's own actions, feelings, and identity by observing others. The next two narrative episodes illustrate how symbolic resources are used to (re)create relationships.

(Re)creating relationships

I rebelled against my parents, I had a couple of dismal relationships, and as a result of that, I became closer to my family. And distant from everyone else.

– Sebastian

Both narrative episodes are drawn from interactions with my third participant, Sebastian, who explained how he (re)defined his relationship with his first long-term boyfriend, Tripp.

They [Sebastian's parents] did come to the realization that I'm more or less gonna do whatever I want to do, and there's no point in trying to tell me to do otherwise. And, I think when I got into my first major relationship, that had a lot to do with, the fact that it was to cut off ties to my parents, which is what I did. I was very much in a rebellion stage. I was, declaring my independence. My relationship with him [Tripp] facilitated my breaking my ties with my parents. And, and, trying to, to um, go about things independently of them.

Essentially I was trying to create a married situation, is the best way I can think of to say it. And I intended to do that very quickly. I intended to establish a household I suppose, if that makes any sense. Which, granted, I did succeed in doing for a while.

Yeah, sometime in late April he [Tripp] asked me to marry him, which I just thought was a very odd concept, a concept of two guys getting married. The thought of my saying, "Oh, this is my husband" just doesn't, I mean it just doesn't see-, feel right. I mean, on an intellectual level, yeah, it makes perfect sense. And it's very reasonable. But um, I don't feel it, if that makes sense. It's not something, I mean yeah, I can picture two men in tuxedos standing in and saying "I do." But I just don't, understand, not understand it, I understand it completely. It just seems, strikes me as odd, or something off.

And being the way that I am, and the way I was raised it would have probably been more or less an engagement, marriage, and the typical line. I probably wouldn't be much of one to swing, so to speak, if I had been straight. But in any event, I didn't take the idea of a relationship with a man seriously, or two men having a relationship. Um, he obviously did.

I think a lot of that had more to do with my preconceptions of what a relationship should be, I guess. As best I can tell I'm very much the type that if I had been straight I probably would have taken a very conventional, orthodox path. You know, meeting some woman, getting married. There's an excellent chance that I would probably have held off until I was actually married to, to do anything. You know, had children, had a life, or whatever. Just the typical all-American type, I suppose. For lack of a better word. But uh, you know the typical path down through family life. Um, probably would have been divorced someday by my wife because I work too much or something like that. But, you know, would have been very much that type of thing. And obviously that wasn't going to happen. So, I think that I was having a lot of problems through that whole period of

time like I said before due to the fact that I was gay at all. I still have some problems with that. Um, so I think that, that was in a sense a way of getting as close to my ideal as I could get with the cards I'd been dealt.

It was just the upbringing I guess. My brother and my sister are very much the same way. They're gonna get married, they're gonna have children and they're gonna get married with the intent of being with someone all their life. My family was the type -- let's say for example, that you don't wonder whether you are going to go to college. It was just like the natural state of the -- being that you were going to go, you know, your life is very clearly marked out so to speak, regardless of what you're actually going to end up doing. You're gonna go to college very shortly after you're gonna get married and have children in your mid-twenties and so on. Just the very typical view of how things are going to be. The normal view so to speak. There's another word for it, the traditional, that's it. Yeah the traditional view of, of the family, so that was what I was brought up in and that's where that came from, I guess.

And that being my first major relationship and the first relationship that I was living with someone, it just seemed natural for me. There is no better way for me to explain it I guess. At the time it wasn't something I questioned. That was just the way things were, I suppose. Um, and like I said before, if that had been an actual marriage to a woman that's probably very much how I would have conducted things, just as one would be expected. It's not necessarily as I would wish to have things go, if that makes sense. And chances are if I had been straight and had gone to that I would have very much had the traditional role in mind. I probably would not be the way I am now where I think of the relationship of as like two partners. I would have probably had a very traditional picture of the female and the male role and how that would go about happening.

The way I would go about conducting a relationship has changed dramatically, I guess. How I moved from that was by observing a lot of people in relationships and that, most of that happened since I had went into a relationship with Tripp. That really moved me away from the traditional model of a dominant and passive partner, to the model that I'm at now, I suppose.

And the relationships that I have liked, which unfortunately have been my shorter relationships, had been much closer to a real partnership of equals. You know the matter of who's the stronger within the relationship? I very much go towards the idea that both should be strong. I take the word partner very literally. It's a two-way street in every sense of the word. And um, I guess you can hardly have a two-way, it wouldn't be a very effective two-way street if both individuals were weak, you know. I don't want a daddy and I don't want a child. And this is something that's of course gone through an evolution and something that I've, you know, very firmly come to only maybe in the past year I guess. Um, that I've really been able to put all this into words I suppose and been aware of what I'm looking for and what I want. Um, I would want the other people to be very stable and very secure within themselves and within their own lives. And then combine those as a way of sharing their two lives together if that makes any sense. Not, not one of them leaning on top of the other one. I see a lot of people, and I especially see this in a lot of possessive relationships, and, I've seen it from both sides, you know, where people take their self worth from the other individual. And that, I've seen that from both people who tend to be passive and people who tend to be dominant. And that's something I'm not interested in at all. If that makes any sense.

In this narrative episode, Sebastian described his desire to create a relationship with Tripp in order to (re)create a relationship with his parents, specifically, one that was more independent of them. That is, Sebastian formulated a strategy to create a new relationship with his parents (Baxter, 1988; Baxter & Simon, 1993). Canary and Stafford (1992) define maintenance strategies as “communication approaches people use to sustain desired relational definitions” (p. 243). Strategy can also be understood as the coordination of appropriate means with a desired end. Baxter and Simon (1993) detailed ways relaters employ strategies to sustain a particular quality of a relationship -- for example, relationship satisfaction -- in the presence of ongoing dialectical tensions and flux. In this narrative episode, a primary dialectic at play is autonomy–connection. Sebastian’s strategy was to use his relationship with Tripp to rebel against his parents. To accomplish his objective, Sebastian drew on cultural views that “establishing a household” is a sign of maturity and being an adult, something that would clearly distinguish himself as autonomous from his parents. Even though he was aware at the time that two men getting married was not something that felt right to him, this marriage model was what he knew to draw upon. He labeled his relationship with Tripp using the language he had at his disposal. Thus, Sebastian drew on the cultural script of the “all-American” marriage to fashion his relationship with Tripp, which was subsequently used as a strategy to establish autonomy from his parents.

When I asked where he learned this script, Sebastian identified the source as his familial upbringing. The force of the script so permeated his life that it was seen as natural, a given, to the point he took it for granted while growing up. He even acknowledged that the script did not work for him, but that it was the best he could do “with the cards he had been dealt.”

Rather than performing as a bricoleur, Sebastian’s narrative suggests that he operated as an engineer. The following statements, “Essentially I was trying to create a married situation...,” “I intended to establish a household...,” “...had more to do with my preconceptions of what a relationship should be...,” and

“Just the typical all-American type, I suppose,” all indicate that Sebastian was working from abstract models to guide his activities. The language used to characterize his relationships with Tripp and his own parents suggest that he methodically designed a plan that was guided by abstract principles of what constituted “a household,” “a marriage,” and “the typical all-American type.” Acting as an engineer, Sebastian still drew on resources, such as scripts (“the typical all-American type”) and experiences from his family (“It was just the upbringing I guess”) to create his relationships. This illustrates the value of following Levi-Strauss’s view of bricolage as a process of improvisational assemblage, rather than Conville’s view of bricolage as the raw materials themselves. As this example illustrates, resources are drawn upon by both bricoleurs and engineers. To describe the process of drawing on resources itself, it may be helpful to label this the activity of humans as interpretive beings, using such language as “encoding/decoding” (Hall, 1980).

One comment in this episode suggests that it is not helpful to maintain a rigid distinction between the engineer and the bricoleur. Sebastian said that his quasi-marriage relationship with Tripp was "... in a sense a way of getting as close to my ideal as I could get with the cards I'd been dealt." Clearly, Sebastian embraced an abstract ideal, but his reference to "the cards I'd been dealt" suggests that he did take into account the concrete materials in his immediate environment when he fashioned his relationships with his parents and Tripp. The language used, however, gives priority to the abstract, ideal model into which Sebastian fitted his world (his experiences, parents, and Tripp).

There is further evidence in this episode that problematizes the bricoleur-engineer dichotomy. Part of the "given" Sebastian learned from his family (and larger cultural influences to be sure) included the "traditional" model of the dominant-passive relationship. Sebastian drew on common roles of a father (dominance) and a child (passiveness) to define this kind of relationship that he no longer wanted: "I don't want a daddy and I don't want a child." He continued, "...and I especially see this [dominant-passive model] in a lot of possessive relationships... How I moved from that [model] was by observing a lot of people in relationships..." After his own personal experience with Tripp and observing other relationships that he did not want to emulate, Sebastian created a new model for the way he "go[es] about conducting relationships." In this example, Sebastian operated from the dominant-passive model in his relationship with Tripp, but found this unsatisfying because both "people take their self worth from the other individual." He then generated a new model of equality based on his own experiences and observations of others in possessive relationships. In this sense he charted a future trajectory, based on equality and partnership, for the way he would like subsequent relationships to operate. In order to generate this new model, Sebastian was attentive to bits and pieces of his own experiences and observations of others, much like a bricoleur. In this example, then, it seems that Sebastian moved back and forth between the bricoleur's "continual reconstruction" of concrete experiences and the engineer's abstract reasoning. Based on my understanding of Levi-Strauss's view of

bricolage, I do not know how he would characterize the activity in this example. Levi-Strauss (1966) commented that:

The difference [between the bricoleur and the engineer] is therefore less absolute than it might appear. It remains a real one, however, in that the engineer is always trying to make his way out of and go beyond the constraints imposed by a particular state of civilization while the 'bricoleur' by inclination or necessity always remains within them. (p. 19)

Levi-Strauss further argued that "it is important not to make the mistake of thinking that these [bricoleur and engineer approaches] are two stages or phases in the evolution of knowledge. Both approaches are equally valid" (p. 22). It is tempting to argue that bricolage serves as complementary or an alternative understanding of how people relate in their relationships to the view, posited by social cognitive/constructivist approaches to interpersonal communication, that people follow abstract cognitive schemata. However, I do not have the background nor space to argue, for example, that a cognitive approach to relationships constructs people more like engineers rather than bricoleurs. In Chapter 5, I discuss how future extensions of research on bricolage could address how the perspective of the bricoleur relates to views of relationships offered by other theoretical perspectives more traditionally understood in communication and personal relationships. Presently, however, I return to another narrative episode concerning Sebastian and Tripp.

Once Sebastian realized that his relationship with Tripp was not working as he had intended, he decided to (re)create his relationship with Tripp. His first attempt at (re)creating his relationship was to avoid Tripp. Also at this time, Sebastian was becoming interested in someone else, Rick. The following narrative episode tells this story.

When it comes to relationships, the better they are, the more boring they tend to be to explain to someone else.

– Sebastian

Both of the relationships [with Tripp and Rick], more so the first one with Tripp than the second one [Rick], were extremely difficult relationships. And extremely

stressful, and they were sort of a full time affair, in a sense. I worked a lot during those relationships. I worked probably that entire time. I worked at least forty-five hours a week at any given time, but during at least a several month period while I was seeing Tripp it was up to around 80, 85, 90 hours a week. So, between the two there really wasn't much time for anything else. And Tripp, well actually I would say both of them, sort of preferred it that way. Although, it wasn't something that I was really all that conscious of until afterwards. Tripp more so because he was just very obsessive and [for] various other reasons it was not a very wise or positive relationship at all.

That sort of really solidified, like I said, my desire, for the time being, not to be very social. Although I mean I go out quite often, but at the same time, I keep people sort of at arm's length in a sense. I mean, I go out to clubs and I hang out in cafes a lot, but people that I tend to see a lot in cafes or that I tend to see in clubs on a regular basis I don't see anywhere else. Where if I do, it might, for a few people, have been on the path to us becoming good friends. But I sort of cut it off after about a week or two. Usually nothing really conscious; just I lose interest in calling them. I lose interest in hanging out with them so, I just don't.

A lot of what I was doing at that time was sort of escaping everything so I didn't have to think about it, because I still did want to be with Tripp at that time [even though Sebastian was becoming interested in Rick]. God knows why in hindsight. But at the time, I was still disturbed enough to want to be with Tripp. That was one of the reasons why I worked half of second and all of third shift and then slept during the day, so basically I never saw anyone but myself and Rick, which I did not see much either because he worked in the afternoon when I was working and he was around when I was sleeping. And the only reason I didn't take active steps to end it [with Tripp] earlier other than, I mean, I approached it a couple of times, but I didn't get much of a positive response.

'Cause that was a big part of why I was working so many hours. Because by working a lot of hours I didn't have to be around him. If that makes any sense. I realized that, I think, much later. But I think that was a big part of why I was doing that. And that was the easiest way not to be around him. That was just the easiest way to do it. Without just saying I don't want to be around you. And I ended up doing that again later with Rick. Basically the same thing, which is something that I'd learn to do again if I didn't want to be around someone. I could have told him to go away and I never would have seen them again, but, which I had done a couple times since then, but that's not where I was at the time.

[Later on,] I leased a town house, mainly to have more room more than anything else. So, it's easier to avoid someone the more room you have in your living environment. Because I was already very certain that I did not want to be in this relationship [with Rick] anymore. As far as I was concerned we weren't in a relationship anymore. Like I said, I was really escapist and most of what I did at that time [was] to keep my mind occupied. And also designed to keep my social interactions with people practically non-existent. I had stopped going out again.

In a similar manner to Sandy using her weekly phone conversations to disguise her sexual identity from her parents, Sebastian used an everyday

routine, his work schedule, to refashion his relationship with Tripp. By working extra hours, he was able to avoid Tripp after Tripp did not respond positively to Sebastian's break-up attempts. The example of Sebastian using his work schedule to avoid Tripp also typifies a relationship strategy (Baxter & Simon, 1993). Sebastian referred back to this strategy in order to fashion subsequent relationships, as illustrated in this comment: "And I ended up doing that [strategy of avoiding Tripp] again later with Rick. Basically the same thing, which is something that I'd learn to do again if I didn't want to be around someone." That is, employing this relationship strategy (avoiding Tripp by working more hours) generated, as a by-product, an experience upon which to draw for subsequent relating. This example illustrates Conville's (1997) point about the portability of lived experiences: that one's collections of symbolic resources, or "bag of tricks" (or bricolage in Conville's framework) could be transported among relationships, so that something one learned in one relationship could be drawn upon in another relationship. Furthermore, this example supports Conville's assertion that the "bricoleur as relationship maker" draws upon symbolic resources from mundane, everyday experiences and contexts for the purposes of everyday interaction. In this case, Sebastian's routine experience of working extra hours for the purpose of everyday maintenance of his relationship.

Along with his desire to avoid Tripp, Sebastian also sought to reduce his social interactions with others, to keep them "at arm's length." Sebastian achieved this by not investing enough in the relationships to move them past the acquaintance level, another relationship strategy. To formulate this strategy, Sebastian drew upon social definitions of what it means to be an acquaintance and not perform any activities that would advance relationships beyond this point. The definitions for what it means to be "an acquaintance" and behaviors that are considered appropriate are defined by a particular social community (Wood, 1995a). How people make sense of "a relationship," along with how people come to define their own identity and that of others, is illustrated in the next section by all three participants' experiences within and between the gay

and straight communities.

There is, however, no strong evidence in this narrative episode to suggest that Sebastian acted as a bricoleur or an engineer. Although I do argue he drew upon resources from his own experiences and applied them to subsequent relationships, and that he implicitly drew upon social definitions for what it means to be an acquaintance to determine how to keep people at “arm’s length,” these are general actions of humans as interpretive beings. Further information may reveal that Sebastian acted more like a bricoleur or an engineer, but the evidence available in this episode does not allow an analysis of that sort. Judgment of whether Sebastian acted as a bricoleur, engineer, or both could be made if more information were available about how he assembled the symbolic materials together to fashion his relationship with Tripp. I present this episode as a point of reference to clarify examples of bricolage (with the case of Sandy and Adrian) and activities of the engineer (with the prior episode of Sebastian).

With Sebastian’s narrative episodes I have shown how he acted as an engineer to create a “married” relationship with Tripp. To do this, he drew on abstract, cultural scripts of the all-American family and applied them to his particular situation. Sebastian, employing a relationship strategy, used his relationship with Tripp as a way to rebel against, and establish autonomy from, his parents. The strategy became an element of his relationship repertoire, or “bag of tricks,” which can be transported from one relationship to another. The dominant-passive model Sebastian initially adopted to guide his relationship with Tripp was shaped by his family and larger social forces, thus illustrating sources of symbolic resources.

However, this script became unsatisfactory, and, based on his experiences with Tripp and observations of other relationships, Sebastian explicitly set out to chart a new trajectory to guide future relationships. His new model was based on a model of partnership and equality. When formulating this new model, Sebastian drew on common roles of a father (dominance) and a child (passiveness) to define the kind of relationship that he did not want, as well as to define what he did want, a partnership based upon equality. The ways that

Sebastian created a new relationship model based on equality problematizes any rigid distinction between the bricoleur and the engineer. Further, the example of Sebastian avoiding Tripp reveals where further information is needed to be able to determine whether or not a person was acting like a bricoleur. These narrative episodes also illustrated that symbolic resources can be composed of mundane experiences, such as routinely working extra hours, and used for everyday maintenance strategies, in this case, avoidance.

Sense-making

Walter: If it's so hard to draw the line between your friendships and people that you're dating, does it make sense to even have different labels for it?

Sandy: I think that's something that we've gotten accustomed to when we were in seventh grade and they say, "Oh, you want to go with me?" And you say, "Okay." And nothing changed, you know. Or maybe then after you were going together with someone, you get a note passed to you, or, you know, a special pencil or something, and people just stuck with that. I think that a lot of it comes from people wanting to say, "Oh, I've got a boyfriend."

– Sandy

My lesbian friends and I at coffee -- we had this coffee one time, and we were talking about sex, and they said, well, you know, "What is sex?" And that's -- "What is sex between women, you know?" Because there's all these things that you can't say it's definitely this, that and that, because it's not always these certain things, like with men and women or men and men, you know, where we figured out you could be clothed. There could be no penetration. You could be standing or lying down. You could be anywhere. We could be sitting here, if this was a woman, we could be having sex right now, you know. By those terms, you know, practically if you just like touch them. It's a lot of different things so that when you mess around with a woman, people can say that you had sex, if you just do a certain couple of things, cause of the way the tools work. With men it's a Catholic thing, where this isn't a sin and that is, for me. And you know when you have, and you haven't, definitely. That's all. I think that all the rest of it is all just kind of fun and games for me, for the most part. And that's okay. I can do these things without feeling guilty, for the most part. 'Cause I think the actual distinctions themselves between what is sex and what isn't between men and women just comes from you can't define it with women, that's all with that. So with women it's just how that -- it mostly comes down to how individuals define it. Because every person's a little bit different.

Yeah, when I think about it, I'm just like "No, I'm really so inexperienced, I'm so inexperienced" and it doesn't sound like it. But really I feel like I am. Because -- yeah, because I feel fairly innocent. Maybe not naive, but I mean, I guess I was always comparing myself to my friends. I mean they're always asking me questions about sex and it's like, "I don't know. Why are you asking me?" "Well you're the only one that's done this and that." I was like, "Well, okay. But it doesn't mean I know all these things that you're asking me." (Pause) I feel like a slut [said somewhat sarcastically].

Sandy: I was like, "We're not dating. We're not dating. We're hanging out. We're not dating." So it was kinda weird. But, like we were just kinda hanging out and I liked her, I liked spending time with her and stuff, and we'd go out and do things. We went to dinner a couple of times, and hung out and watched movies at her place or something. And that was like -- in the community, that was considered oh, we were dating. And I was like, "Oh, my gosh." You know. I guess so.

Walter: In the community?

Sandy: In the women's community, out there. I mean, everyone was like, "Oh, yeah. So you were dating Theresa." I was like, "I guess I was, wasn't I."

But, I mean there's an element too of, with the dating thing, where if you go out, there's -- if you are dating, then you're not supposed to be flirting with other people, or hanging out with other people, you know. And if you, you know, if you aren't dating, then that's okay, even though you're hanging out, you know. That's a lot of it. You can tell right there. If when you're hanging out with someone and you start feeling guilty about talking to someone else, then you're probably dating someone. That's what happens in a weird way. But I have a hard time keeping the lines straight, and everyone else does, too. Like Tina and Dick are supposedly exclusive right now, but they're not dating. So I think it's a stupid term to put on there, when they are, you know, by everyone else's standards in the world.

I think people just need to put labels on things a lot. And so they do that. But I think that it's hard to tell for some people. Unless you actually sit down and talk about it as far as friendship and dating. And I don't know if it's all that complicated for other people. Maybe it's just like that for me.

The beginning of this narrative episode presents Sandy and her lesbian friends trying to figure out a definition for sex. Their conclusion is that the lines defining what is or is not sex are more blurred between women than between women and men or between men. Sandy's Catholic background provided a symbolic resource that allowed her to distinguish sex between men and between women: sex equals intercourse. This rule, sex equals intercourse, did not apply to activities between women. However, Sandy and her friends drew upon this rule and (re)defined it as not applicable to their own experiences. For sex between women there seemed to be no such abstract principle ("...it's a Catholic thing") that could be applied to define this set of practices. Therefore, Sandy and her friends had to improvise to make sense of their experiences. They did this by talking and sharing stories from bits and pieces of their own experiences and imaginations ("...we figured out you could be clothed. There could be no

penetration. You could be standing or lying down. You could be anywhere,” etc.). It is interesting to note that the comment “we figured out” indicates that it was a joint discursive activity of sharing stories based on the language the social community provided (Shotter, 1992; Wood, 1992). Thus, the social community is one site that provides the raw materials to make sense of relating. This social community, however, does not exist in isolation. Rather, it is embedded within larger cultural contexts as demonstrated by the influence of Catholicism in this example.

In addition to providing resources to define what a given concept is, a social community is also one site that provides discursive resources that its members use to define their identities (“who I am”) and to label a relationship between two people (“who we are”). In the case above, Sandy notes the combination of how she compares herself to her friends and how her friends communicate with her to arrive at the somewhat sarcastic conclusion about her own identity -- that she is a slut in the eyes of the social community. Sandy again acted as a bricoleur to make sense of whether or not she was dating someone. In this case, Sandy drew on the community’s assessment of her relationship to define it as a dating relationship. Everyone in the community seemed to have “a hard time keeping the lines straight.” Sandy had no abstract model that structured her identity for her or to tell her that she was dating. Rather, she pieced this conclusion together based on her comparisons to friends and her friends’ responses to her actions.

In the process of her narrating this story to me, however, Sandy generated a rule to help her determine whether she was (not) dating, illustrated by this comment: “If when you’re hanging out with someone and you start feeling guilty about talking to someone else, then you’re probably dating someone.” Conville showed how bricoleurs refer back to specific events in order to find resources to (re)define and make sense of a relationship. In this case, Sandy referred back to concrete experiences to generate a rule that distinguishes dating from hanging out. The notion that a social community provides resources for its members to draw on is further illustrated in the next narrative episode, again featuring Sandy.

Walter: So, are there other places where you go out and dance?

Sandy: Just those two [referring to two clubs mentioned earlier].

Walter: Why do you go to those two places?

Sandy: All my friends do. I used to go to [club name], but only because a lot of girls I knew were going out there, but I don't like that place that much. But [club name] is highly -- fag hags, but not that many people wander in there.

Walter: What are fag hags?

Sandy: Girls that hang out like with gay guys. They have a -- they're type cast. I don't know. They're usually supposedly slightly overweight, low self-esteem, slightly unattractive women. But that can depend. A lot of times that's kinda true. Usually they have a crush on the guy they're hanging out with, and that's pretty useless. So, I don't know why.

Walter: Now what's generally the sexual orientation of fag hags?

Sandy: They're straight. So, I don't know. I wonder it's just you're in that community and you start thinking about it.

My question to Sandy about dance clubs further illustrates how social knowledge functions as a resource for relaters. First, knowledge from interaction in the clubs provided materials she drew upon to decide how to create a certain type of relationship. Knowing what type of people hang out at the various clubs allowed her to choose what type of crowd she wants to socialize in that night. Furthermore, the clubs themselves serve as material resources that can be used as a way for members of the social community to create relationships with one another by providing a physical space in which members can congregate and socialize. Up until now, I have limited my discussion of bricolage to its non-material, symbolic aspects, but it is important to understand that resources may take material forms as well. Another example of a material resource, although not mentioned in this episode, is Sandy's freedom earring. Sandy wore this earring to work as a way to construct her own identity and self-presentation. To the extent she utilized this earring in combination with other symbolic and material artifacts, such as clothes, jewelry, etc. in the

construction of her identity, she acted as a bricoleur.

Sandy's discussion of fag hags illustrates another resource used in Sandy's social community. The seemingly pejorative label for (often) straight women who hang out with gay men exemplifies how a social community provides resources not only to define concepts ("what is 'a relationship'"), one's own identity ("who I am"), and one's relationship with another ("who we are" as a dyad), but also, larger groups of people who are deemed "other" ("who others are"). It is helpful here to revisit the structural foundations of bricolage. That is, in Levi-Strauss' original structuralist formulation, meaning is only constituted out of difference. That is, what something means in a given system, and thus, how it is different from other elements, is determined by the relations among the other elements in the particular system. By invoking the label of "fag hags" to define other women, thus creating a distinction between those who label (subject) and those who are labeled (objects), Sandy advances a definition of her identity based on difference from the other, in this instance, fag hags. This process of labeling others shows how Sandy acted as a bricoleur by using a resource provided by her social community, the label "fag hags," to establish who others are in relation to herself and her friends. This process of labeling others and then the social need to account for that labeling is illustrated in the next narrative episode, which explains how Adrian came to view bisexuals based on her discussions within her own social community.

It's like they're questioning your gayness, you know, it really is.

– Adrian

Adrian: *At first it would frustrate me when she would talk about being bisexual and that sort of thing, because I don't know, I mean. See I've talked to Terry [Adrian's close male friend] about this before, and he can relate. But most people can't, because they've not really been in the position where they've been one or the other.*

Walter: *One or the other meaning?*

Adrian: *Gay or straight. Not in the middle, which is what I call being bisexual. And he calls it confused.*

Walter: *Okay. Is Terry gay?*

Adrian: Yes. He's -- he'll go to his grave thinking that it's confusion, and that's all there is to it. I used to think that. But I'm a little older now, and I, you know, have been exposed to different types of people and I don't really believe, I don't believe it's confusion. I don't really know what I believe. But I know it's not that, anyway. I used to feel like sometimes that people would classify themselves as bisexual because it was safe. It was more acceptable than to be gay or be lesbian. Because at any one point, at any time, you could get back. Well now you're with the opposite sex. 'Cause that makes it okay. So for a while I kinda resented that about people who would, you know, say they were bisexual. I felt cheated, because it was so easy for them to say that they were bisexual, yet it was hard for me to say that I was gay. And, I don't know, I just felt -- but I realized that was my choice, you know, I could just as easily come out and say, "Oh, yeah, I'm gay." And be happy about it. But I've not yet got to that point. I mean, with friends, yeah. With people who are like me, I guess. But to go on the street or have someone who doesn't know me know that about me, just bothers me a whole lot. And so in a way I was kind of jealous of the freedom that these people had, and I considered her [Andrea, Adrian's friend] one of those people. So, and she used to tell me, when she worked in the [name of company] that people would just obviously assume that she was straight. And that bothered her. I wondered why in the world would that bother you! She's like, "Because I'm not. That's not what I am." And I'm like, "Well so what?" You know, I would think if anything you'd want them to assume that than the other which would be worse, in my opinion. It's what most people would think. I guess I'm projecting, but most people would consider that a negative thing, to be gay or bisexual. So I just could never understand that. But then in a way it would kinda make me mad, because from what I know about her history, there's never been any women. I mean I know that there was one that she kinda lusted after, but nothing ever happened. So, in my view, she's straight. Not that she has to do anything for her to be anything else, I'm just saying, from what I've seen and from being around her, I don't know, there's nothing about her that's gay. We've always had a hard time with that [in their friendship] because I normally don't express that opinion to her, but a lot of times she'll just come right out and ask, so I have to tell her. And that upsets her. But it doesn't change the way I feel about her, whether she is or whether she isn't, you know, it really doesn't matter to me. I don't know. It kinda bothers me sometimes that people don't just say what they are, or be what they are. Instead of being so wishy-washy. I'm just weird about that kind of -- that subject.

[For example, there's] a man and a woman, they're married, they have two or three small kids. But the guy will occasionally go out to the gay bars with my friend [Terry]. And actually they've been together before. And I find that very strange. But he, which is the one who's married, doesn't consider himself gay, or bisexual. He is just strictly straight. And like, how? Explain that to me. But he thinks that because it's not -- it's just a purely physical thing, it's not emotional, it's not intimate, it's just purely physical -- it's like, again it's like another safe thing that he can still call himself straight. And I just have a really hard time with that. It's like, I don't know. And yet he'd probably be the first one to put down someone who was gay. And it just confuses me. So, I don't know. It's hard to talk about that, because like I say, it's hard for me to put it in words. I mean, I know how I feel about it, but it's hard for me to say it. It's hard to express how I really feel about it, you know what I mean? And I find it's a change from now, now and

then.

I used to feel the same way Terry [her close gay male friend] did, is that I hated it when people called themselves bisexual, because it was like it was an easy out. So it didn't used to be a big thing. I mean, well, when I was in my like late teens, early twenties, you were either gay or straight. There were no bisexuals. Or there were no professed bisexuals. I mean, you know, just from being out at the bars and things like that, you did not see a straight person out at a gay bar. It just -- that's not the way it was. So things have changed a lot in the last seven or eight years. It really has. Because really people who were bisexual were really looked down upon, because they were placed in that category of confusion.

Walter: Looked down upon by whom?

Adrian: The gay community. Because like I say, you feel kinda resentful. It's like they want to halfway be in it, but not want to take on the whole responsibility of being what they are. You know what I mean? That was the attitude, pretty much, of the whole gay community, at the time. But I think people are a little bit more open to it now, and they're like, "Well, I don't care, you do what you want to do."

But gay people are very prejudiced, even amongst their own. They really are. That's just like one of my other friends, Monica. I haven't known her [for more than] six or seven months. For a while there she would only go to like the women's bars. I've never been to any of those places, because I feel very uncomfortable there. She's like, "I can't believe you've never been there. You really need to go there. You really need to hang out with us. Blah, blah, blah." I'm like -- I enjoy going where I go, and I have a good time when I'm there. And I feel very comfortable. But I get a lot of flack from people, especially gay women about that. It's like they're questioning your gayness, you know, it really is. So, but I've never -- I haven't run across anybody yet that I feel like I have to justify myself to. So I will continue to go where I like it.

John Shotter (1992, p. 19) argues that "our experience and understanding of our reality, the form of our social relationships, and our selves are all constituted for us very largely in the ways of talking that we must use, if we are to be accounted by the others around us as competent adults, in accounting for it [our reality] (and for ourselves) in our society" (emphasis in original). I want to play off a dual meaning of the word "account" to illustrate how bricolage is used in the foregoing narrative episode. Shotter first uses "account" as a verb that refers to how we account for, or justify, ourselves to others in our social communities to be counted as worthy of membership in that community. Second, Shotter refers to "accounting," or justification, as enacted narratively in discourse among members of a community. Sebastian provided an excellent example of this when he talked about his dating relationship with Tripp:

I forgot to mention, I did have a cat and a dog. He [Tripp] had them both put to sleep while I was working, but I didn't know that he had them put to sleep. I found that out after we separated. He apparently didn't like them. He didn't bother to tell me he didn't like them because I would have found some place for them to go. Um, but he just said they both ran away. So anyhow, that usually gives people a fairly good idea of what Tripp was like. Um (laughs), and, to what extent I lost my mind.

A key phrase here is “that usually gives people a fairly good idea of what Tripp was like.” It indicates that Sebastian has told this account, this story, of Tripp murdering his pets to others, and that this was a way to account for, or justify to himself and others, the extent to which Sebastian had lost his mind. Tripp’s actions within their relationship provided an unintended by-product -- a symbolic resource, a story -- which Sebastian later used to account for the relationship and himself to others in a social community.

In her narrative on the previous page, Adrian claims that “I haven’t run across anybody yet that I feel like I have to justify myself to.” Based on what she says in the rest of this episode, I disagree. Although she may have not had an explicit confrontation with another person where she had to respond to account for her sexual orientation, her immediately prior statement, “It’s like they’re questioning your gayness, you know, it really is,” suggests that she does feel some obligation to account for her sexual orientation. Furthermore, earlier in the episode, Adrian questioned Andrea, her friend who identifies herself as bisexual, about her sexual orientation and claims that it is simply a “safe way out.” Adrian then states a criterion that seems to have some significance in determining whether or not Andrea is indeed a card-carrying member of the gay community (“... from what I know about her history, there has never been any women... so in my view, she’s straight”) even though Adrian later says that no such criterion is necessary (“not that she has to do anything for her to be anything else...”).

At the end of this episode, Adrian expressed the feeling that her own sexual identity was being questioned by her lesbian friends because she did not go to lesbian bars, but preferred the comfort of hanging out with her gay male friends

instead. Adrian commented: "It's like they're [her lesbian friends] questioning your gayness, you know, it really is." Burke's discussion of essences clarifies the process of social justification. As discussed in Chapter 2, an essence posits what something is based on what it is not. Adrian's comment about questioning her "gayness" is a statement about her essence. The suffix "-ness" refers to the state, quality, or condition of something. Literally, gayness refers to the state or quality of being gay. A community, by its very definition, draws lines around those aspects that it includes and excludes. That is, just as Sandy's community defined what "sex" and "a relationship" was, Adrian's lesbian friends defined certain features that constitute an essence of what it means to be gay (in this case, going to lesbian bars and hanging out with her lesbian friends more). If Adrian does not match those features, then her identity as a member of the gay community is open to question, and her narrative demonstrates that she is aware of this questioning.

Shotter (1992) argues that the social community provides certain resources - - vocabulary, arguments, etc. -- upon which individuals draw to justify their membership to others in that community. In this case, Adrian played the "comfort" card by making the argument that she "enjoys going where I go, and I have a good time when I'm there. And I feel very comfortable." It is then up to the social community to decide if that is an acceptable argument of justification, which in this case, it seemed to be. Adrian, then, drew on this symbolic resource, an argument (or account) that was available to her in her social community to account for, or justify, her behavior. Furthermore, this episode exemplifies the bricoleur as storyteller that Conville (1997) demonstrated in his analysis.

In this episode it seems that bisexuals have a tougher time accounting for their membership in the gay community. According to Adrian's account, the label bisexual has considerable negative connotations attached to it by the gay community because bisexuality is considered a "safe" response, confusion, or wishy-washy. Although clearly not representative and with no intent to be so, Sandy, who identifies herself as bisexual, provides support for this

characterization, “I like being in the middle, because I can hedge. Choose either way.” To Adrian, and apparently to others in her community, being able to choose was (at least at one point) seen as a “safe,” and therefore, not admirable response. In one sense, bisexual individuals could “poach” on their identification with the gay community when it suited them, and could at any later time take up identification with the straight community to take advantage of the heterosexual privileges.

According to Adrian’s conceptualization of bisexuality, a bisexual individual lives “betwixt and between,” traveling between the gay world and the straight world, occupying a position of either “safety,” confusion, or a wishy-washy nowhere, unless taking up identity with other bisexuals (Lugones, 1994). Based on Adrian’s account then, a bisexual individual enacts a paradox. That is, bisexuality as “the middle position” both eludes, and is eluded by, identification with the gay or straight social communities. A person who is bisexual can maintain a strategic “safe” position by not having to identify with either the gay or straight community, hence, eluding identification with either community. And, simultaneously, a person who claims to be bisexual cannot account for his or her own identification with either community; thus identification with either community eludes the bisexual. Simultaneously, then, the bisexual is the subject of elusion, that is, eluding definition or identification with a social community, and the object of elusion, being eluded by (lack of) identification with the gay or straight worlds. If the rigid dichotomy of the gay and straight world is maintained, as it once was/still is, then a bisexual individual is limited to, or enabled by (depending upon one’s perspective), this “middle position.” I addressed this issue in my field notes after an interview with Adrian:

WHICH IS INTERESTING, I THINK, WITH ANY MATTER ABOUT SEXUAL ORIENTATION. IT SEEMS LIKE THERE IS SOME NOTION OF FIXITY, THAT, “WELL, YOU’RE REALLY GAY.” OR, “YOU’RE REALLY STRAIGHT, BUT YOU’RE NOT SURE, YOU’RE UNCERTAIN, AND SO YOU’RE GOING TO TRY TO BE SOMETHING ELSE.” WHEREAS ANOTHER ALTERNATIVE APPROACH MIGHT BE A RECOGNITION OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION AS MORE FLUID. AND THAT BECAUSE YOU HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH A WOMAN AT ONE POINT AND A MAN AT ANOTHER POINT, THAT’S NOT NECESSARILY FRAMED AS THAT PERSON IS UNCERTAIN, OR INSECURE, OR SUCCUMBING TO SOCIAL PRESSURES, BUT MORE, MAYBE, THAT’S WHAT SHE’S DOING AT THAT TIME, OR THAT’S WHAT THAT PERSON IS DOING AT THAT TIME.

AND IT JUST MAY BE THAT SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION ARE MUCH MORE FLUID CONCEPTS THAN CHARACTERIZED BY THESE MORE RIGID CATEGORIES.

The discursive resources that a social community provides, in this case, labels and category systems, legitimize certain ways of relating over others. The labels gay and lesbian were articulated as acceptable in the gay community, while the label bisexual was articulated with wishy-washy or confusion, thus not as legitimate as gay or lesbian. Furthermore, a more fluid understanding of sexuality, similar to relationship flow that I discussed in Chapter 2 and in the foregoing journal entry, seems consistent with the continual rearticulation of meanings that the bricoleur exemplifies. Rather than placing people into pre-existing abstract categories, such as heterosexual, gay, lesbian, transsexual, bisexual, etc., meanings and accounts for various practices can be continually refashioned according to the concrete context.

For example, Sebastian commented in one conversation: “I probably have four classifications which would be straight and gay females and straight and gay males, and each one of them I approach differently when I see them. To deal with them and react to differently.” Sebastian seems to be approaching relating more like an engineer with abstract categories that people are placed into and then responded to differently. In this system, there seems no way to “categorize” Sandy, for example. A bricoleur might approach this and rearticulate new meanings for this category system, or maybe throw it out all together, constructing ways of relating that makes sense with the immediate concrete needs of the situation. This is not to say that an engineer is necessarily more inflexible than a bricoleur, but the distinction is a matter of working more from abstract categories (engineer) versus concrete, lived experiences (bricoleur). In the full range of human activities, people probably move back and forth between concrete and abstract processes, as Sebastian ends up doing: “Um, at, but those lines are becoming more blurred, like I said, as I’m becoming more... I’m becoming, less of my identity I guess comes from the fact that I’m gay, than once did.”

In this section about sense-making, I have illustrated how Sandy and Adrian

acted as bricoleurs by drawing on the resources provided by their social community to make sense of and define concepts such as sex (what an activity is), identity (who I am), relationship between people (who we are), and other groups of people inside and outside of the social community (who they are). Further, I argued that bricoleurs relate within and between multiple social communities and that the discursive resources that different communities provide may conflict. I concluded this section with Shotter's notion of social accountability. That is, how members of a particular community account for, or justify, their membership in that community. Members do this by acting as bricoleurs, who draw on discourse, in general, and accounts, or stories, in particular, that they narrate to others within that community. This process of bricoleur as one who accounts for her or his reality is similar to Conville's (1997) bricoleur as storyteller.

Summary

In this chapter I discussed examples from narrative episodes that demonstrated general processes of drawing on symbolic and material resources. I showed how participants acted as bricoleurs, continually (re)assembling discursive resources without a specific structure or end in mind. The available resources in their immediate context influenced the forms and ways of relating that eventually emerged through the process of drawing on these resources. Participants acted also as engineers, approaching these resources with abstract, pre-planned structures that guided selection of specific resources to accomplish pre-defined ends. I also presented examples where there was not sufficient information in the narrative episodes to determine the manner in which participants drew upon the discursive materials. Further, I problematized a rigid dichotomy between the bricoleur and the engineer. I concluded the chapter with Shotter's notion of social accountability and illustrated how participants, performing "bricoleur as storyteller," accounted for their membership in multiple sites: the family, relational dyad, friendship networks, social

communities, and larger cultural contexts. I take up the notion of accountability further in Chapter 5 when I discuss how the participants narratively accounted for their relationships to me in the context of our interviews and shared experiences and how my writing of this thesis is an account to others in the academic community.

Looking Backward, Looking Forward

As I discussed in Chapter 3, this project was conceptualized on two distinct, yet related levels. The first level focused on how the participants worked with discursive resources in their personal relationships with significant people in their lives. I explored this first level in Chapter 4 by providing bits and pieces of my participants' personal narratives and then analyzing their narratives using the bricolage/bricoleur perspective. I discussed how people engage in general processes of drawing on symbolic and material resources. Participants acted as both bricoleurs and engineers, and lines between the two are blurred. As bricoleurs, participants operated from their concrete lived experiences, continually rearticulating meanings in an improvisational fashion. As engineers, participants worked from abstract, pre-ordained structures that guided their actions and resources upon which they drew.

The bricoleur/bricolage perspective helps researchers of personal relationships to understand processes of creativity and improvisation in personal relationships. In so doing, it perhaps complements and/or challenges theoretical understandings that represent people as relating from abstract, cognitive schemata. Additionally, bricolage points to the multiple social and discursive sources of the resources upon which relaters draw. Further, the context and content of the resources that relaters draw upon is often everyday and mundane, areas often overlooked by scholars of communication and personal relationships.

The second level of this project focused on the relationships created between me and each participant during the two months of interviews, shared conversations and experiences. I take up this second level in this chapter by reflecting on my activity as a researcher, and thus, writing myself

further into this thesis. Following my reflections on the research process, I suggest ways to extend the bricolage/bricoleur perspective into research on communication in relationships.

Reflections on the Research Process

My relationships with Sandy, Adrian, and Sebastian cannot be separated from other relationships and activities in my life. Further, my writing about these relationships does not exist in isolation but is enmeshed within larger institutional practices of academia. I defer discussion of my first point about not being able to separate my relationships with participants from other aspects of my life, so that I can first address my second point about institutional practices of academia. This second point cannot be more clearly illustrated than with a discussion of the process of institutional review that approved this thesis and its implications to my research on processes of relating.

Accountability and institutional practices of academe

After receiving approved consent from my three committee members to go ahead with my project, I engaged in a month long process of obtaining permission to conduct my research from the Academic Affairs Institutional Review Board (AAIRB). Federal regulations require the AAIRB to approve “all research involving human subjects conducted under the auspices of a department, school, or research unit within the Division of Academic Affairs, regardless of funding status⁷.” Research is defined as “a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge.”

Many projects that are reviewed by the AAIRB receive exempt or expedited review status. Exempt status means “the proposed research poses minimal risks

⁷ All direct quotations regarding AAIRB are taken directly from the AAIRB Manual, revised August 1996.

to subjects and satisfies other criteria” of the AAIRB. Expedited review “is a review of minimal risk, non-exempted research by at least one IRB Committee member,” often the chairperson. My project (#96-011), however, was deemed worthy of “Full IRB Review” which means “all members of the AAIRB will review the submitted research proposal at the next scheduled monthly meeting.” Based on what I was told by the Chair of the Committee, my project required a full review because participants in my project were part of “protected groups” and because I would be asking them potentially sensitive questions about their personal lives. Therefore, according to AAIRB, this represented greater than “minimal risks to subjects.”

Armed with arguments to support my study and my advisor, I accounted for my project in front of a full review board which convened in a meeting room located in the basement of the Graduate School. After suitable justification had been offered and mandatory revisions were cited to me, the review board approved my study.

I tell this story not to attack individual members on the review board or to suggest dismantling the institutional review process, because I recognize the value of ensuring protection of participants’ rights, especially considering historical examples of abuses regarding human participants in academic research. Rather, I present this story because it illustrates the establishment of rigid categories about how people relate with one another based on sexual orientation. That is, if I made no mention that I was talking with people who identified themselves as bisexual or queer, members of “protected groups,” I was told by the Chair of the Committee that this project could be “expedited,” rather than requiring a “full” review.

Although there is still clear evidence of discrimination for those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, etc., there was no explication by the Committee of what my participants were being “protected” from. Furthermore, Lorin Basden Arnold (1995) argues that:

if we go into research with a priori assumptions about the appropriate category for a particular group of people or relationships, then are we not

likely to find similarities within that group? If we see that grouping as being “opposite” or “crossed” in relation to another category, aren’t we likely to see differences between them? (pp. 242–243)

Arnold continues with this call for fellow researchers “to consider the assumptions that drive their own research, the political statements made by those assumptions, and the extent to which some ways of looking at relationships may flatten out the variety in our interpersonal landscape” (p. 243).

My concern is that by thinking of my participants as members of “protected groups” I am encouraged to see them not as individuals who relate with people who are significant to them, but as member of special or distinct groups that relate in ways “other” than those of people in “unprotected groups.” Arnold’s (1995) research on friendships investigates this issue of labels that categorize relationships.

Thus, our attempts to define cross-sex and same-sex friendships as distinct types of relationship [sic] do not reflect the full range of friendships. But perhaps the problem is not just with such descriptions of friendship but with the very labels used to divide the types. (p. 242)

Bill Rawlins (1994) states that all friendships (and I believe he would agree that all relationships) “are potentially sites of struggle due to the politics of sexual orientation, gender role orientation, and the enabling and constraining circumstances of our lives” (p. 1). To more fully understand the processes of relating without rigid classification systems, I attempted to go into my interactions with participants without a priori assumptions about their “protected group” status.

The issues of categorizing relationships and essentialism surfaced in an interview with Adrian that I discussed in Chapter 4. Adrian’s comment, “It’s like their questioning your gayness...,” raises issues about what it means to be gay (or straight, or bisexual, etc.) and the constitutive features required to be an accountable member of the “gay community” (or straight community, etc.). Are “allies,” or heterosexual people who support gay rights, and who often socialize with individuals who are homosexual, a part of the “gay community?”

Categories based upon one's sexual identity become problematic in terms of deciding who is or is not a member of a specific community.

Another alternative to identity as a criterion for determining membership in social communities is to focus on social practices (L. Grossberg, personal communication, March 5, 1997). For example, there could be a set of practices that are labeled "homosexual" and anyone, regardless of sexual identity, could behave in these ways. Adrian's friends gave her "flack" for not going to lesbian bars, such that this and other practices became the criteria for determining if she was sufficiently gay.

A third position that might successfully negotiate categories based on identity and practices, is performance (L. Grossberg, personal communication, March 5, 1997). That is, defining people by how they perform, or enact, or practice various identities, within radically contextual situations. One's sexual identity contributes to the practices one enacts and the practices one enacts constitute one's identity.

Placing people in abstract categories is not inherently bad or misleading, but there are dangers of essentializing the criteria that determine membership in a category, as Adrian experienced and explained. Both categories based on identity and practices can be essentialist, and thus, problematic. That is, both approaches seem to stipulate that there are certain unchanging characteristics that determine inclusion in or exclusion from a specific category. A performative paradigm, although not perfect, offers a view that has the potential to be more fluid and processual, recognizing that one's sexual identity influences one's practices, and vice versa, but that these identities and practices can change based on the context of the performance (Conquergood, 1995).

I address these issues of identity, practices, and performance because they affected how I made sense of my participants' narratives. That is, I began to see myself in their narratives. I noticed experiences and category systems in my own life surface in their stories. For example, Sebastian had a system of categories that he drew upon when relating with people. "For that matter, I probably have four classifications which would be straight and gay females and

straight and gay males, and each one of them I approach differently when I see them. To deal with them and react to differently.” Sebastian went on to say, however, “But those lines are becoming more blurred as I’m becoming – less of my identity comes from the fact that I’m gay, than once did.” Sandy also mentions that in matters of determining whether something fits within the category of a friendship versus a dating relationship that she has a “hard time keeping the lines straight and everyone else does too.”

Relating with participants

Presently, many of my lines about how to relate with people are blurring. This leads me back to the first point mentioned toward the beginning of this chapter: that my relationships with my participants cannot be separated from other relationships and activities in my life. That is, I came out of a religious context that had very defined practices of relating based on heterosexual(ist) identities (Arnold, 1995). I tied much of how I thought about relationships to the religious framework that structured my relationships for me. Similar to Sebastian’s taking for granted what a marriage relationship meant when he used that definition to guide his relationships with Tripp, I took for granted and left unquestioned the category system of relationships that I inherited from my religious background.

It is important to note that there were multiple contexts that contributed to my perspectives on relationships, since my religious background existed within larger social and cultural contexts that intersected with some of my religious traditions. My motivation to create new ways of relating with people that were not based on such rigid classification themes directed many of my questions and my analysis. Further, developing the concept of relationship flow helped to understand more fluid views on human relating. Simultaneously, however, I problematized my views such that in this blurring I tried not to erase the differences of my own (hetero)sexual(ist) privileges brought about by power inequalities (Conquergood, 1995).

Throughout this project I also wanted to explore ways to relate with my participants in the research context. My initial views of how to conduct qualitative research were based on the notion of distance between researcher and participant. There are times when I felt lost in the interviews, where I was hiding behind my questions while my participants were sharing very intimate aspects of their lives. Part of this feeling of being lost was due to my felt accountability to academia as a social community. That is, I often had visions of how I would need to justify what I was doing to audience members while I was presenting this project at a professional conference, some of whom espouse strong views about objectivity and researcher distance.

For example, in our longer interviews there were times when the tape recorder would click off when one side of the tape ran out. Each time, I would hurriedly make efforts to switch the tape over and press record again so that I could get everything on tape. The implicit assumption is that I could more easily justify my arguments and claims about what transpired in the interviews to other academics if I could get my participants' comments on tape and quote exactly my "informant." It became clear that, at least early in my interviews, a norm of academic accountability was controlling our interactions.

Even though many of our audio tape recorded interactions had informal, conversational elements to them, I experienced some of them as objectified interactions. This became clear when my participants and I had a "shared experience" of going to a movie or to dinner. When Sandy, my first participant, and I went to the movie and dinner, I did not bring a tape recorder. I felt like I had to remember everything that happened and always be "on" so that I could record everything in my field notes. I placed consistent checks on myself to make sure I was not thinking of Sandy as just an object who provided me data that I would later analyze and then use to defend a thesis. Granted, I was especially sensitive to the dangers of objectification, but I experienced a qualitatively different feel that was not "objectifying" with Adrian, my second participant, quite by accident.

Adrian and I went out to dinner one night at an Italian restaurant. I had a

terribly exhausting day, draining any voluntary mental capacities beyond breathing and cardiovascular functioning. I was not prepared for what I thought I needed to be prepared for, that is, performing as a responsible researcher. After agonizing over the implications and consequences I would experience if I ever told my advisor regarding what I was about to conclude, I decided firmly, “screw my thesis, and just relax and eat dinner with another person.” This decision proved to be one of the more rewarding moments of my study. Adrian and I shared what happened in our days, talked about our families, and had a genuinely good conversation. On the ride home I realized that I could replay the whole dinner into the tape recorder with ease, actually documenting many stories about her life and relationships, thus assuaging any guilty feelings about academic accountability.

When I asked Adrian about the evening the next time we saw each other, she remarked that the only difference she noticed was that she did not talk the whole time like she had in previous meetings. She enjoyed herself, but I was a little disappointed as I felt it was a turning point in our relationship and my thesis project. Fortunately, our next meeting with each other continued in this conversational mode, proving to be satisfying interpersonally and helpful in terms of learning more about her significant relationships. From this experience I do not conclude that tape recording is inherently bad, nor that interviewing situations are inherently objectifying. Rather, I am inclined to think that there are more objectified elements to them than casual conversations and that these moments should be acknowledged and interrogated (Borland, 1991).

I think it was those conversational, informal moments where I felt there was a personal connection between myself and Sandy, Adrian, and Sebastian, other than just a researcher-subject relationship. I feel that this connection is valuable in its own right to my understanding of them as persons, and perhaps it contributes to a richer description and analysis in terms of my thesis project. It is important to note that I do not feel one must become “buddy, buddy” with each participant. In fact, for this thesis project, I think there is value to keeping some distance since this actually creates more comfort for the participant to disclose

rich, personal information without worry of me disclosing it to others in their social community. My point, however, is that there is a certain comfort and closeness that can be cultivated that proves to be rewarding for both myself and my participants, and for the academic accountability of the thesis project.

Cultivating this closeness also constitutes the work of a bricoleur because it requires me and the participant to draw on other experiences where we enact closeness in other relationships. The symbolic materials for this creation can be mundane and everyday, while it can also require moments of improvisation. In the following example with Sandy, it required both. The night after my first meeting with Sandy, I saw her at a dance club. I did not realize she would be there, and taken a bit by surprise, I was not sure how to respond to the situation. My first thought was to go up and say hello, because we were just two people going out dancing. My next thought was that I remembered asking what clubs she went to and she might think I came out to spy on her (a somewhat silly thought, but I was uncertain and new to this research thing).

Before I knew it, we made eye contact with each other, and I waved. I then went up to ask her how she was doing and we laughed about the situation. The symbolic resource in this situation is my wave. This simple gesture that I make probably dozens of times every day to greet people became the improvisational moment of the bricoleur. I did not know what to do in the situation, so I drew upon, somewhat unwittingly, what I do in different, yet related, situations. As is the function of most mundane communicative practices, the wave smoothed the way for further interaction, for me to go up and briefly laugh with her about the humor in the situation. In our next meeting, I referenced this shared experience in order to begin the conversation. Our shared experience generated a by-product that I drew upon in order to cultivate a conversational climate, serving as another example of mundane bricolage.

My relationships with my participants and my experiences performing this research have been very rewarding. Through my participants and this process, I learned more about my own activity as a bricoleur and more about the enabling and constraining forces of academic and institutional accountability. In the next

section, I would like to discuss future extensions of the bricolage/bricoleur perspective to relational communication research.

Extending Bricolage In Future Research

I would like to see research in relational communication extended in at least the following three ways: 1) continuing to emphasize *process* and *relating*; 2) making connections of bricolage to other theoretical perspectives (e.g., social cognition/constructivist perspectives and structuration theory); and 3) drawing on personal journals in the research process as a site to locate examples of bricolage.

Emphasizing process and relating

In Chapter 1, I noted that English-speakers, at least in the United States, seem to privilege nouning over verbing when talking about how people interact with one another, a focus on relationships rather than relating. Furthermore, people describe themselves as being “in relationships” such that the relationship is static, containing the person. The bricolage/bricoleur perspective invites relationship researchers to focus on notions of motion and process in relating because it is only in the activity of the bricoleur, *drawing* on the resources, that constitutes bricolage. Bricolage is a process of improvisational assemblage; the bricoleur working without a specific end or abstract structure in mind, but a logic and structure emerges based on the available resources. Research that posits linear developmental models (e.g., Knapp, 1978) seem to operate more from the processes of the engineer, rather than the unfinished, (re)articulating processes of the bricoleur.

One specific area that I want to continue the use of the bricolage/bricoleur perspective is to ask how are people creative in generating new forms of relating when the ways people learned to relate in the past are no longer sufficient. For example, many of the people in my own history have lost faith in the guiding

doctrines of their church. The church is no longer the guiding social force in their lives governing their relationships. As a result of the church membership splitting into often oppositional spin-offs, many people lost their stable community that was provided by the church's centering forces. How do people in this, and related situations, create new communities of belonging⁸? Are the ways they previously enacted relationships going to continue to work for them, perhaps with adaptations? How much of these ways will they continue to draw upon when creating new approaches to relating?

Bricolage and other theoretical perspectives

Second, I would also like to see connections made between bricolage and other theoretical perspectives. For example, how might bricolage complement and/or challenge social cognition/constructivist perspectives? I made implicit and, at times, explicit connections throughout this thesis by using the language of some cognitive schemata, most notably, scripts. I argued that people drew on scripts of relating that served to guide their actions. One example was the script of the good marriage that Sebastian used in his relationship with Tripp.

When I discussed sense-making, I could have also used the language of organizing experiences. How are prototypes, social constructs, stereotypes, and scripts used to make sense of oneself, the relationship, and others? Do these cognitive schemata count as discursive resources? Are people who are cognitively complex more adept bricoleurs? Since, as Conville (1997) argued, knowledge about symbolic resources is relationship knowledge, does knowing about an individual's or social community's symbolic and material resources contribute to larger understandings about one's cognitive maps of meaning? Rather than complementing social cognitive perspectives, however, bricolage might also radically challenge them by arguing that people, more often than not, work from their concrete experiences, improvising ways of relating as they go,

⁸ I appreciate valuable discussions with Lawrence Grossberg to help me develop this point and for the phrase "communities of belonging."

and do not act from such abstract schemata.

Other theoretical perspectives present relaters drawing on resources in order to get around in the world. For example, Anthony Giddens (1984) discusses how people's lives are simultaneously structured by social forces and people actively draw on resources and practices to create their symbolic worlds. Another example is Barnett Pearce's (1989) discussion of coordinated management of meaning. He argues that people draw on resources to coordinate communication and human action. He defines resources as "all those stories, concepts, perceptions, memories, and so forth, by which persons make their world coherent." He also illustrates the notion of by-product by showing how "today's conversation is guided by resources, and the memory of the conversation becomes part of the resources that guide our conversation tonight." Based on my experience with bricolage as a lens to understand human relating, I see it as a rich, fertile perspective that should be understood in relation to other perspectives on communication and personal relationships.

Journals as a site of bricolage

Even though I made efforts to engage in dialogue with my participants about my interpretations of their personal narratives, I have limited understanding of how our relationships developed as researcher and participant. I was only able to draw on my own field notes and journalling. I got the idea of using a journal after I had already met with Sandy, so I asked Adrian and Sebastian to keep a journal about their feelings and reflections on the research process. I asked them to write specifically about the relationship that is developing between me and them. I told both that they did not have to show me any of their journal if they did not feel comfortable doing so, or they could show me parts of it, or all of it. I also offered to let them look at my journal.

After asking to write a journal, however, I felt awkward about asking them how they were progressing with it based on all the other time and energy they were committing to me. The journal became optional and I did not "push" the

issue much. Adrian apparently did make some notes in her journal, but said that she did not feel comfortable sharing them with me. I do not think Sebastian chose to keep a journal for the project, although I think he journals some on his own.

Asking both the researcher and participants to maintain a journal offers a more dialogical perspective on the relationship, rather than my relatively monologic representations of our relationships. Furthermore, journals may provide personal accounts of how participants and researchers assemble together symbolic and material resources -- that is, how they act as bricoleurs or engineers -- to sculpt their relationship definitions. I feel that if it is clearer up front that both the researcher and participant will keep a journal, then it will be a valuable contribution to learning about how participants write themselves into the research project, drawing on discursive resources in the process.

Summary

In this chapter I reflected back on my experiences generated by conducting this research and on my relationships with my participants. Prior to this, I discussed the practices of accounting to academe as an institution and how this accounting process impacted my views going into and during my project. I concluded this chapter with extensions of the bricolage/bricoleur perspective to future research on relational communication. I feel that bricolage holds great promise as an analytical lens to understand notions of motion and creativity in personal relating.

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