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Abstract

In new-paradigm research, empathic witnessing by the researcher might create within the researcher–participant relationship a space for participants to share and transcend their suffering. I explore this theme through the constructionist grounded theory analysis of interviews, fieldnotes, and my self-reflexive commentary from an original study conducted to understand the experiences of suffering and healing among the survivors of an earthquake that occurred in India in 2001. The five categories that emerged—getting overwhelmed while verbalizing suffering, search for the cultural meaning of the research relationship, piecing together of self, reaffirmation of moral status, and continuing bond revalidating the self—provide insights about this theme. Also, my reflections on participants’ suffering and healing not only facilitated my healing but also inspired me to expand my boundary of *I* to feel “oneness” with all forms of nature or existence. The findings and discussion not only enhance understanding of the communications and complexities of the researcher–participant relationship, but indicate the nature of support and education needed if researchers are to be effective witnesses to suffering.

Keywords

grounded theory; healing; relationships, researcher-participant; self; suffering

In the long run, the legitimacy of any scientific exercise rests in the hands of people it serves. (Edward E. Sampson, 1993, p. 1228)

The discursive or interpretive turn in the 1960s that marked a paradigm shift in social sciences has facilitated the study of human experiences in ways that take into account the research participants’ perspectives or worldviews. Furthermore, the recent trend in qualitative research has emphasized the need to address the axiological question in social sciences: the ethical responsibility to facilitate “flourishing” and self-growth of research participants.¹ Lincoln and Guba (2000) accentuated this point for the “new paradigm” research in social sciences that are constructionism, critical theory, and participatory inquiry approaches: “For new-paradigm inquirers, the preeminent paradigm issues of ontology and epistemology effectively are folded into one another, and methodology and axiology logically folded into one another” (p. 175).

If methodology and axiology are logically folded into one another, the human relationship between a researcher and participants must have the potential to facilitate flourishing, healing, or self-growth for both. In the domain of crisis and suffering, researchers have noted several (at times, unintended) positive outcomes of a humanizing research

relationship, such as healing or self-growth for the participants (Ahlberg & Gibson, 2003; Alty & Rodham, 1998; Aylott, 2002; Charmaz, 1999; Colbourne & Sque, 2005; Dyregrov, Dyregrov, & Raundalen, 2000; Hutchinson, Wilson, & Wilson, 1994; Kvale, 1996; Lipson, 1984; Morse, 1994), or for both researcher and the participants (Cartwright & Limandri, 1997; Charmaz, 2004; Frank, 2000; Kiesinger, 1998; Kleinman, 1988a; Sque, 2000).

The literature on ethical issues associated with interviewing, and particularly interviewing those participants who face agonizing experiences or suffering, also emphasizes that it is an ethical and intellectual responsibility of a researcher to enter into a caring and empathizing relationship with the participants (Cartwright & Limandri, 1997; Charmaz, 2000; Coyle & Wright, 1996; de Reave, 1994; Frank, 2000; Sque, 2000). Thus, the process of genuine coconstruction between the researcher and the participant is possible only in a humanizing relationship

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in which the researcher is primarily a human being who is prepared to empathically connect and communicate with the participant.

So, what are the ways a genuine coconstruction facilitates healing and self-growth for the participants facing some form of crisis or suffering in their lives?² Suffering because of illness, loss, or trauma; the ignorance of it on the part of others; and stigma one is subjected to over one's illness by society does demoralize a sufferer, or tells upon his or her self-esteem (Frank, 1995, 2000; Kleinman, 1988a). Also, in a nonlinear model of suffering, with its two states of enduring and emotional suffering (with discernible differences in their verbal and nonverbal expressions), Janice Morse and her associates posited that enduring is generally the initial response to an extraordinary physiological or psychological assault in which emotions become "suspended" as the person becomes disconnected from the immediacy of living, fearing that the impact of the tragic reality would overwhelm him or her emotionally, or disintegrate him or her (Morse, 2002; Morse & Carter, 1996; Morse & Penrod, 1999). Gradually, as the sufferer comes to acknowledge that what has happened is real, release of emotion (at times, overwhelming) takes place and this state is termed *emotional suffering*. Subsequently, this state also finds the sufferer piecing together a new perspective of reality, and this is where he or she seeks commiseration from another who can empathize.

Frank, in *The Standpoint of Storyteller*, delineated the difference between researchers' usage of the terms *narrative* and *story* to indicate the purpose research communication serves to participants. He pointed out that some researchers might look at the research interaction merely as the process of generating narratives as data for analysis but, for a participant, the interaction essentially involves their stories, which they want to be listened to as they seek emotional or experiential space through the stories they tell about their lives. He posited:

However valuable analysis can be, analysts risk misunderstanding if they move too quickly outside the storytelling relation as they transform the story into a "text" for analysis. . . . [T]he risk of reducing the story to a narrative is that of losing the purpose for which people engage in storytelling, which again is relationship building. . . . Storytellers do not call for their narratives to be analyzed; they call for other stories in which experiences are shared, commonalities discovered, and relationships built. (2000, p. 355)

Kleinman (1988a) supported the view that empathic witnessing of or existential commitment to be with someone who is suffering might "facilitate his or her building of an illness narrative that will make sense of and give value to his or her experience" (p. 54). This process of narrative

restructuring of self that is mediated by participants' cultural beliefs and values (because one who is suffering falls back on these to restructure one's self or give it a new enabling meaning) is known as remoralization or healing (Kleinman, 1988a; 1988b). Furthermore, Charmaz (1999) and Kleinman (1988a) observed that a person's claim of moral status might be followed by reflections that contain sage advice and wisdom for him- or herself and others. This transformation might be understood as self-growth facilitated in a research relationship.

This introduction has exposed the challenges of investigating aspects of disaster and trauma, and highlighted the value of elucidating the researcher-participant relationship in these contexts. Kleinman (1988a; 1988b) and Frank (2000) have described the process of remoralization that might be initiated by empathic witnessing. Also, Morse (2002), Morse and Carter (1996), Morse, Beres, Spiers, Mayan, and Olson (2003), and Morse and Penrod (1999) have elucidated the process of emotional suffering followed by enduring. In this study, I utilized a combination of these two processes as the metatheoretical frameworks to explore how empathic witnessing by the researcher might create within the researcher-participant relationship a space for participants to share and transcend their suffering. Through these frameworks, I have reanalyzed interviews, field notes, and my self-reflexive commentary from an original study that was conducted to understand the experiences of suffering and healing among the survivors of an earthquake that occurred in India in 2001. Finally, in this article I also share my reflections on how the researcher-participant relationship not only facilitated my healing but also inspired me to expand my boundary of *I* to feel "oneness" with all forms of nature or existence.

My Approach to Understanding the Experiences of Earthquake Survivors

To reveal the process underlying the humanizing impact of the research relationship on participants and researchers in new-paradigm qualitative research,³ I need to clarify the particular approach and background that I brought to understanding the experience of earthquake survivors in this project.

Epistemological Stance

The epistemological position adopted for the present study was that of constructionism. The constructionist epistemology lays emphasis on knowing the experiences, perspectives, or worldviews of participants in their sociocultural context through coconstruction, where the researcher's experiences and philosophy of life might shape the content of research communication and analysis of narratives (Gergen, 1985; Sampson, 1993). This makes it important for me to share

some thoughts on my personal stance or philosophy of life that was an integral part of the research process.

Personal Stance

At the time I began the study in 2001, I fully identified with existentialism. Soren Kierkegaard, among other existential philosophers, proposed that in the wake of existential crisis,⁴ one has a choice between authentic and inauthentic modalities of existence (Coffer & Appley, 1980). This has been my own lived experience.

Crisis and meaninglessness. In early adolescence I started realizing inherent contradictions and meaninglessness in religious and social norms (those that pivotally shape our schema). Be it my personal suffering or suffering at large, I found these norms to be undoing their own purpose, that is, the growth and well-being of human beings. Detestable social practices and rituals associated with my sister's bridegroom selection⁵ by my parents and relatives, and the norms exerting excessive psychological pressure on us for selecting careers out of few prescribed choices,⁶ were some of the most significant personal experiences that have repeatedly made me feel the meaninglessness and absurdity of life. In addition, global capitalism in the garb of local political anarchy in various parts of my country aggravated the feeling of meaninglessness. However, despite such unnerving experiences, my struggle to search for some aesthetic and ethic in life continued.

Search for meaning through research. I had an urge to feel and understand the likely existential crises of the earthquake survivors through my own experience of existential crisis, and to contribute whatever I could through the research process. Now, as I reflect, I also see how an existential search led me to relate authentically to fellow human beings during the project. Besides being motivated by a sense of responsibility for the earthquake victims, through the research I was also seeking resonance for my own search for meaning in life. I was seeking commonality of experience of a sustained struggle to obtain an enabling meaning in life (Frank, 2000). The participants also made me realize, as I elaborate on below, how I am constituted of the same forces or consciousness that constitutes nature, or the entire cosmos.

The Study

An intense earthquake measuring 6.9 on the Richter Scale, with its epicenter in the Bhachau block of Kachchh district, struck the state of Gujarat in India on January 26, 2001. The death toll in the entire state of Gujarat was 13,881, out of which 12,221 deaths occurred in Kachchh district alone (Gupta, Gupta, Sinha, & Sharma, 2002). I adopted the biopsychosocial model of health and illness to study the processes of survivors' suffering and healing,

as influenced by the sociocultural beliefs and customs, support networks, and socioeconomic forces in the post-earthquake period (Engel, 1977; Kleinman, 1988a). The biopsychosocial model is in accordance with the constructionist epistemology as it situates the personal experiences of illness or suffering in their sociocultural context. Kleinman (1988a) and Kleinman, Das, and Lock (1998) point out that suffering damages subjectivity and intersubjective connections in the sufferer's life. My overarching goal was to study the postearthquake suffering and healing processes, exploring in particular how sociocultural context impacted the survivors' subjective experiences and intersubjective connections. I wanted to explore and describe

1. the processes of suffering and healing embedded in the sociocultural context through personal accounts/narratives of the survivors;
2. the changes in survivors' experiences of suffering and healing during the postearthquake period of 3 years; and
3. the social representations of suffering and healing in the postearthquake period.

As the work progressed I became aware that my research relationship with participants was providing an experiential space for their remoralization. Therefore, for the purpose of the present study, I decided to interrogate data for insights into the nature of my role and relationship over the 3-year course of the research, and to specifically explore how empathic witnessing by a researcher might create within the researcher-participant relationship a space for remoralization of the participants.

For ethical reasons, the names of participants and key informants have been changed. Also, the names of research sites (the village and town in Kachchh district where this study was conducted) are not disclosed.

Methodology

I used the research methodology of ethnography that facilitated in-depth exploration of participants' experiences of suffering and healing in their sociocultural milieu. Besides providing the opportunity for multiple interactions with the participants, it also facilitated creative use of multiple methods like semistructured interviews and participant observation to understand their constructions of suffering and healing. Adult members of earthquake-stricken families (in which at least one death had occurred) in one rural and one urban sociocultural setting (a village in the eastern part of Kachchh and a town in the southeastern part of Kachchh) participated in the study, which was conducted in three phases over a 3-year period. Each year I spent between 1 and 2 months undertaking the fieldwork.

Research Settings

I selected an urban and a rural site to conduct the study, wishing to capitalize on the contrasts between the two in terms of their community life, cultural beliefs, and customs. Another rationale was the difference in the number of deaths: 33 in the village, and several thousand in the town. According to the local authorities, the percentage of houses that were completely destroyed in the earthquake was more than 95% in the town and more than 40% in the village. After 2 years, more than 90% of these houses were rebuilt in the village. Before that, people lived in tents near their destroyed houses or in rented houses in the same village. The huge destruction in the town delayed the work of debris clearance, new town planning, and the reconstruction process. Up to 2 years after the earthquake, hundreds of families were still living in temporary resettlement colonies constructed with the financial support of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). These consisted of tin-roofed houses (one small room with an attached kitchen) with communal toilets and bathrooms. Data collection in the town was difficult because survivors living in these colonies shifted their place of temporary residence in search of work, which was in very short supply because of the huge destruction across the entire township.

Entry Into the Field

The fieldwork began in November, 2001, at the village. Since I had done some voluntary work for 2 weeks in June, 2001, through a rehabilitation project⁷ run by the University of Delhi in five villages of Kachchh district (including the rural research site for the study), I was familiar with some villagers and the teachers and principal of the high school in the village. The principal of the high school provided me with accommodation within the school campus. I needed to gain the acceptance of the villagers and I did this by taking up a role in the village. Prior to making a decision about the role I could take up, whenever the children passed me by they would shout, “*Aa Dilliwalla chhe*” (“This person is from Delhi”) or “*Dilliwalla aavi gayo*” (“The person from Delhi has come”) and run away, being very reluctant to come near the stranger (me). I wanted to be friendly with the children, and therefore decided to take the role of a teacher in the high school. The principal of the high school was kind enough to allow me to teach mathematics and English in grades 8 and 9.

In the few classes of mathematics and English that I had taken, I had feedback from the students that I could make them understand the lessons well. So, carrying out the role of a teacher in the school helped me to be held by the students in high esteem. After this, when I used to come across the children in the evenings, they yelled to me, calling me *Ravi Bhai* or *Ravi Saheb* (the suffix *Bhai*

is usually added to the name of a man, and the use of the suffix *Saheb* is a mark of respect for a teacher, an officer, or a learned person in Gujarat state) instead of *Dilliwalla* (a person from Delhi). Thus, the engagement with students in the school for about 2 weeks earned me acceptance in the village among not only the children but also, through them, among their families. Even after my “teaching assignment” was over at the school, I continued to help children in their studies, as I could spend time with them at their houses.

During one of the days of my teaching at the school, I met Sudhakar Bhai after a game of volleyball that we (teachers and students of the high school) used to play in the evening. He was a teacher at the boys’ primary school in the village and was quite friendly with the teachers of the high school. After I explained to him my purpose in coming to the village, he volunteered to be a key informant in the study, sharing that he found my proposed work meaningful. I also required a translator during the interaction with the survivors in the village, as the villagers could communicate only in Gujarati language. Sudhakar Bhai agreed to be a translator during my interaction with the participants during interviews. One advantage of having Sudhakar Bhai as the key informant and translator was that he was respected by the villagers because he had been serving in the village as a primary school teacher for more than a decade, and he had stayed in the village after the earthquake to help the villagers, particularly in getting the loss of life and property (for which the state government of Gujarat had to provide monetary compensation) documented by the government officials. Thus, in the company of Sudhakar Bhai I was able to meet the participants and interact with them, and they started relating with me as the frequency of our interactions increased over a period of time.

My access to survivors in the town was facilitated by my taking up the role of a volunteer at an NGO called *Child Line*. The project run by that NGO had the major objective of rehabilitation of children through extra-curricular activities including games and art competitions. I helped the NGO in preparing their progress report in the English language, besides freely mixing with the children in the project. The staff members of the NGO helped me by taking me to the affected families living in the temporary shelters. I was also helped by another key informant, Karamsi Bhai, a reporter for a local newspaper, who gave me information about various resettlement colonies and led me to meet some survivors residing there.

Participants

The two key informants, Sudhakar Bhai in the village and Karamsi Bhai in the town, helped me gain access to families who had lost one or more family members.

Rural participants. I, along with Sudhakar Bhai, approached 20 adult survivors of the village to gain their

consent for the study; all of them gave their consent. All 20 survivors participated in each phase of the study over the 3-year period. By the end of Phase I of the study, I was regarded by most of the participants as a “good and helpful” person. This, along with the respect that Sudhakar Bhai enjoyed among the villagers, helped gain ongoing consent from participants. Out of the 20 survivors, 16 were men and 4 were women. Ages of men ranged between 25 and 58 years, whereas the age range of the women was 29 to 48 years. Nineteen participants were Hindu and one was Muslim. Thirteen participants were farmers, but only 5 of them had any means of irrigating their land. The other 8 farmers were solely dependent on rainwater for irrigation. A “good amount” of monsoon rain that is sufficient for cultivation comes to Kachchh once every 3 or 4 years. These 8 farmers, therefore, had to work in some other farmers’ fields to earn their livelihood. Because of their poor economic condition (earning a monthly income of about Rs. 2000 or less, the equivalent of about \$40 US), they sometimes had to borrow money from others. The other 7 participants were also from low socioeconomic stratum, with their traditional occupations being tailoring, sheep rearing, manual labor, and shopkeeping.

Urban participants. With Karamsi Bhai’s assistance I gained the consent of three different sets of 20 survivors to participate in the three phases of fieldwork because the survivors of the town shifted their places of residence rather frequently. In Phase I, out of the 20 participants who gave their consent, 2 expressed their inability to complete the interview as they found discussing the traumatic event to be emotionally disturbing. Similarly, in Phases II and III, out of 20 participants who gave their consent, 4 in each of the phases could not complete the interview because of emotional disturbance. Thus, finally, there were 18, 16, and 16 participants, respectively, in the three phases of fieldwork in the town who completed the interviews. Also, out of 16 participants in the second phase, only 5 had participated in Phase I. These 5 participants (who had participated in both Phases I and II) were also among 12 participants of Phase II who also participated in Phase III. Thus, there were 4 “new” participants in Phase III, and the total number of participants over the three phases of fieldwork in the town was 33.

Out of the 33 survivors who participated in the town, 16 were men and 17 were women. Ages of the men ranged between 22 and 48 years, whereas the age range of the women was 15 to 62 years. Two participants were Muslim and the others were Hindu. Nine of the participants were tradesmen or shopkeepers, and their businesses had been destroyed in the earthquake. With some financial aid from the government and assets recovered from the debris, some were able to restart their businesses and had a livelihood. Three participants were manual laborers, another 3 were government employees (teacher, engineer, and water-motor

operator), 4 were housewives, 9 were high school students, 3 men were unemployed, and 1 was a reporter for a local newspaper.

Data Collection

Multiple techniques of data collection were used, as described below.

Semistructured interviews. I developed the items for the semistructured interviews with survivors, keeping in mind the objectives of the study. For example, items to explore the participants’ experiences of suffering and healing included “Please tell me about the activities you generally engage in throughout the day,” “Please tell me about your current feelings,” and “Please share your feelings associated with the activities you engage throughout the day.” To understand the changes in participants’ experiences of suffering and healing over time, items such as “Please share with me the difference between your experiences during the first week after the earthquake and those in the present time” were used. “Please narrate the causes of *dukh* (agony or illness) and *sukh* (health) according to your beliefs” was used to explore the cultural beliefs of health and illness. “Please share the ways in which these beliefs have influenced your recovery from trauma” facilitated the exploration of how cultural beliefs shaped the experiences of suffering and healing. Similarly, suitable items were developed to explore the role of social support networks (family, relatives, community, government, and NGOs) in shaping the experiences of suffering and healing and to understand the social representations of suffering and healing. Furthermore, the probes regarding suffering also included symptoms of posttraumatic stress such as reexperiencing of the traumatic event, persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness, and persistent symptoms of increased arousal (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

In the village, semistructured interviews with the participants were conducted in the home setting, and Sudhakar Bhai helped me as a translator. In the town, the participants could communicate in the Hindi language and the interviews were conducted either at their makeshift homes or in workplaces. I took prior consent from the participants for their participation in the study, recording of the interviews, and about the fact that their anonymized responses would be used in research manuscripts and publications. My wife accompanied me during Phases II and III, and she was present with me during interviews with women participants. I had obtained consent from the women participants about the presence of my wife during the interview; in general, they expressed their good feeling about meeting her.

I used all the items in the interviews across the three phases of fieldwork. I conducted a minimum of one interview with each participant in each phase. I conducted two

interviews with some participants, particularly when the shared experience of suffering was intense. This helped me to explore the context and nature of suffering. The duration of the first interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes. Subsequent interviews varied in length from 20 to 45 minutes. In Phase I, I audio-recorded the interviews. These interviews were then transcribed verbatim. The preparation for subsequent interviews was done by taking a look at the profiles of participants, contents, and initial codes (that were developed during analysis) of their first interviews. In the beginning of Phase II, both key informants advised me not to audiotape the interviews because some staff of an NGO had misused recordings of some survivors' responses regarding the monetary support they had received from the state government as compensation for the destruction of their houses. Taking it to be a sensitive issue, rather than audio-recording the responses of the participants in Phases II and III, I made notes during the interviews. Instead of writing entire sentences spoken by the participants, I wrote the important names, events, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs of each sentence. I rewrote them as complete sentences and got them checked for correction with the participants in the next informal meeting with them, scheduled according to their convenience. Flexibility in ordering the items while conducting the interviews, and the initial focus of the interviews on the positive aspects of their lives encouraged the participants to share their experiences with me.

Participant observation. The villagers considered me a resource person in education. Therefore, I engaged in teaching or some sport (e.g., cricket) with children in and around their houses whenever I found time during daytime hours in the village. In the town, as a volunteer of Child Line, I could engage with children and their parents in cocurricular activities. Such informal participation helped me understand the family atmosphere and social relationships of the survivors through observation. During the semistructured interviews, I could take a note of the nonverbal expressions of emotions (e.g., sadness), such as crying. Besides the verbal (tonal quality of speech) and nonverbal expressions of emotions during interviews, I wrote fieldnotes about their living conditions, relationships with people around their houses, and everyday activities as I met them for multiple interactions. The fieldnotes were also supplemented with my reflections on ethical concerns, my capacity to empathize, and the physical and mental exhaustion, personal learning, and inspiration that I experienced while conducting fieldwork.

Humanizing Impact of Research Relationship on Participants

As my research progressed, and I observed and interacted with participants several times over an extended time

period, I reflected on how participants were trying to find a space or resonance in others of their personal experiences. I began to view this as a remoralizing process that facilitated mutual self-growth.

Constructionist Grounded Theory Analysis

I explored the humanizing impact of the relationship on the participants systematically by analyzing participants' interview narratives, and my own observation and fieldnotes with this in mind, using constructionist grounded theory. Charmaz (1995, 2000, 2001) emphasized that a rich conceptual analysis of lived experiences of people through emerging categories can be a meaningful purpose of a constructionist grounded theory study.⁸ This orientation enabled me to code the coconstructions with the participants in terms of categories using the procedures of initial focused and axial coding per the guidelines given by Charmaz (2000, 2006). Initial coding began with line-by-line and incident-to-incident coding. Through the method of constant comparison I compared the codes resulting from initial coding of the research narratives and notes taken about participant observation with the already available initial codes from the original study. For example, an already available initial code was "reexperiencing self as a continuous process across time." When I considered it for constant comparison with the new initial code "directing the interview toward participant's secure domains of feelings," it gradually led me to develop another initial code, "piecing together of self through interviewing." I took this as the focused code, because it seemed to substantially explain how, carefully guided by the researcher, the research interaction might facilitate an increased sense of coherence. The process of axial coding involved refining and specifying the properties of a category by linking it to its subcategories. For example, through axial coding I developed the focused code "piecing together of self through interviewing" into a category with subcategories of "being guided toward secure domains" and "gaining coherence."

Using constructionist grounded theory analysis I developed five categories, with attendant subcategories of how the research relationship facilitated remoralization and self-growth among the participants:

1. *Getting overwhelmed while verbalizing suffering:* Getting overpowered by intense and incomprehensible feelings while attempting to narrate them before a listener.
2. *Search for the cultural meaning of the research relationship:* Figuring out the nature of human relationships with and the role of the stranger (researcher) in one's current life situation.

3. *Piecing together of self through interviewing*: Initiating a communication with the person that enables him or her to gain coherence in experience related to distinct life events. This is facilitated by enabling thoughts, experiences, and cultural discourse.
 - (a). *Being guided toward secure domains*: Directing the interaction to participants' nonthreatening or positive domains of life circumstances, thereby providing him or her a sense of relief.
 - (b). *Gaining coherence*: Gaining coherence in experience through narrating with a sense of relief about life circumstances.
4. *Reaffirmation of moral status*: Gaining meaning and value or worth for one's experience through narrating how one adhered to culturally valued principles or practices.
 - (a). *Experiencing high self-esteem or heroism*: Gaining high self-esteem or a sense of heroism through expressing adherence to culturally valued principles and practices.
 - (b). *Sharing wisdom*: Sharing wisdom derived out of adherence to culturally valued principles and practices.
5. *Continuing bond revalidating the self*: The human bond developed through the empathic understanding of the participant's experience becomes a space where his or her meaning and worth of self is reaffirmed.

Although these categories appear to be in chronological sequence, they often overlapped and were not sequential either within a single interview or over time. I have chosen to present these findings in a series of four vignette's to indicate the evolving impact of the research relationship on remoralization and self-growth of the participants. The method of presentation also allows me to include data from my real-time fieldnotes and consider ethical issues as they arose.

Participants' Remoralization and Self-Growth: Contribution of the Research Relationship

Below I present four vignettes containing narratives that are the indicators of the five categories of how the humanizing research relationship—which made our continued interaction during the three phases of fieldwork possible—could facilitate participants' healing and growth. I chose the vignettes of these participants because I interviewed them across all three phases of fieldwork, and my interaction with them became the humanizing space where they could either attain or reaffirm their moral status or a new enabling meaning in life amidst trauma.

Vignette 1: Nirmala Ben

Nirmala Ben was a woman in her mid-40s.⁹ She was not able to bear a child before her husband was killed in the earthquake. In Phase I, Sudhakar Bhai had briefed me about the death of this woman's husband. Her husband firmly believed in religion and had been held in high esteem by the villagers. He had also informed me that she had been feeling low since the death of her husband. On the first occasion we visited Nirmala Ben to obtain her consent to participate, we met her elder brother-in-law, who lived in her neighborhood. Sudhakar Bhai shared with him our purpose of interaction with her. The brother-in-law was of the opinion that taking part in the research and interacting with people might help her recover from her sorrow. I agreed to his suggestion that he be present during the interview as her close relative, providing strength for her to share her feelings.

Getting overwhelmed while verbalizing suffering. I remember sitting in Nirmala Ben's house along with her brother-in-law and Sudhakar Bhai. I tried to initiate interaction with her by asking about her general daily routine at the current time. After a silence of about 2 minutes, she slowly uttered a sentence, "*kain . . . kain karun chhun*" ("Something . . . I do something"). Then tears came to her eyes and neither she nor I spoke for about 10 minutes. These minutes of silence posed to me some serious questions about my role as a researcher. Was it ethical to interact with her when there was a risk of her feeling disturbed about the traumatic incident? My gut feeling told me to just be existentially with the person (Kleinman, 1988a) and hope for some more communication that might help her feel better, but the minutes of silence did not seem to be coming to an end.

Search for the cultural meaning of the research relationship. With tears in our eyes, after this silence, I indicated to Sudhakar Bhai to suggest she take rest and we would come again to meet her. Then something remarkable happened. She responded, possibly out of her commitment toward her guests, that we would take tea with her and she went to prepare this. There was an insistence in her voice. After a while she quietly served us tea.

Piecing together of self through interviewing. I just hoped then that we might have contributed a bit in some piecing together of her experience and facilitated healing, as I thought that the gesture of serving us tea might have given her a sense of being a responsible human being by following her cultural values (of adhering to *karma*, i.e., internalized duties toward self, family, community, and nature) and taking care of her guests. Did my speculation prove to be correct? For ethical and pragmatic reasons of avoiding taking her back to the experience of being overpowered by intense emotions during which she might recall her traumatic experiences, I could not ask her (throughout our interactions in all the three phases) whether serving us

tea gave her a sense of being a responsible human being (thereby, giving her a sense of coherence or meaning). But it was clear from our interaction about 10 months later in Phase II that she had found an empathic listener in me, one with whom she could share her experience spontaneously and authentically. Before meeting with Nirmala Ben in Phase II, I was in touch with Sudhakar Bhai by telephone. Our conversation gave me some relief that Nirmala Ben was taking care of her nephews and spending most of her time in the *ashram* (the place of residence of a holy person that is also used for religious or spiritual activities).

Reaffirmation of moral status. In Phase II, when we went to meet her, she smiled and introduced us (myself and my wife) to her neighbors. This was evidence of her improved life condition in comparison with her sorrowful state during the interview in Phase I. She had become more active and social as she called us to a *satsnag* (collective activity in which a priest delivers sermons) organized by her at her residence. She looked a bit disheartened knowing that we, because of our commitment to interview another participant, would not be able to attend that. She took it in her stride, however, and continued talking to us. About her present life condition, she said,

My two nephews stay with me. Sending them to school, looking after them, offering my services at the ashram of Mansingh Das Baba [a Hindu priest of the village], and doing satsang there keeps me engaged the entire day. My work, satsang, and devotion to God are everything for me.

It is clear from this sharing by Nirmala Ben that she had gradually moved on and found meaning for her life in offering services toward her family and the priest (in accordance with the culturally shared belief of karma). Her description of how rendering such services was everything to her was a reaffirmation of her moral status. In Phase III, too, we found Nirmala Ben engaging quite actively in her service to Mansingh Baba's ashram. Offering her services to ashram, holding prayers, and *bhajan* (holy song) there formed a major part of her daily routine, in addition to looking after her nephews. She admitted,

I had found a new direction in life through trust in God and service to Him. Motivating others to join worship, *satsang* or *kirtan* [holy song sung by a group of people], particularly by Mansingh Baba, has become an important aspect of my life.

Continuing bond revalidating the self. When I asked her whether she felt like avoiding interactions with me as these might remind her of her loss (a symptom of

posttraumatic stress) in the disaster, her reply was, "*Tame prem thi puchu chho, tyare bikh nathi laagto*" ("You interact with compassion; therefore, I do not feel sad talking to you about the incident").

While taking leave from her when I said that I wished to come back to the village again and meet the villagers, she answered back with a smile and energy in her voice, "*Tamne avavuj padshe*" ("You shall have to come"). This, to me, was an indication of a genuine relationship I had been able to develop with her. I did meet her in an informal visit in January 2005, and Sudhakar Bhai continued telling me over the telephone about her welfare.

Vignette 2: Meghraj Bhai

I had first met Meghraj Bhai way back in June 2001, when I was a member of the team of volunteer students participating in rehabilitation work of earthquake-affected people of six villages of Kachchh district. A 46-year-old man, a tailor by occupation (he also had to work as a manual laborer when he did not have much tailoring work to earn his livelihood), he had to face the trauma of the death of his mother in the earthquake. Knowing that he was a tailor, I once during this visit to the village had gone to him to get my torn trousers repaired. After he repaired them, he did not charge any money for the work, saying that we were there in his village for a noble cause. Despite my insistence, he refused to take any money for his work. Because his house was near the cluster of small shops in the central part of the village, I often used to come across him and his 5-year-old daughter, Sheetal Ben, playing near the shops. I used to have informal interactions with them whenever we met there. Also, I had developed a liking for the cute looking Sheetal Ben; Meghraj Bhai liked my becoming friendly and playful with her. I had also started holding him and his entire family in high esteem for taking care of each other in the face of crisis (which I came to observe during my informal and friendly visits to his house).

Search for the cultural meaning of the research relationship. During Phase I, when I told him about my research and my plan to interview him, he agreed to it, and he also gave me compliments for it as he shared, "Such interactions would give us emotional support." We had started relating with each other as good, friendly human beings.

Getting overwhelmed while verbalizing suffering. During Phase I, when I went to his house for an interview, he sensed the purpose of our interaction and spontaneously started sharing his memories of the event:

When the event occurred, I had just been surgically operated on as a treatment for *bhagandar* (fistula in the anus). The wound had not healed completely.

When the earthquake occurred, there were nine family members inside the house. All nine of us were suddenly under the rubble. My younger daughter, Sheetal Ben, at that time was about to go to market with one rupee coin in hand to purchase something. She came under the fallen main door of our house and no stone fell on her. Still, it took us two hours to take her out. I was under the rubble up to my chin. All of us were under the rubble, but seven of us could be saved. One of my sisters got seriously injured. My younger brother was outside. My niece and mother could not survive.

Meghraj Bhai could not speak further, as his voice choked. He had tears in his eyes after sharing this as a response to my query about his current daily routine. Perhaps the sense of loss was so overpowering that he began narrating it, given an opportunity to interact about the earthquake (and I represented a person exploring experiences related to the earthquake).

Piecing together of self through interviewing. After a pause, I tried to direct his attention to some encouraging experience he had had after the earthquake by asking him what had helped him to take care of himself and his family members. He calmly narrated,

Villagers helped in taking out the rest of us [from the rubble]. My operation [surgical wound] also failed due to this event. Only two days back, I have returned from Ahmedabad after getting the operation conducted for the second time. Younger brother lives in a separate house now. I have borrowed some money to run the household. I didn't find any [tailoring] work after the earthquake; therefore I am in debt. In addition, I also had to pay for medicine, operation, etc.

Gradually in our conversation, Meghraj Bhai was trying to piece together his self by acknowledging the help he received from the villagers and narrating about his life condition in the present.

Reaffirmation of moral status. In the same interview, what he shared next was a reaffirmation of his moral status:

My *mamaji* [maternal uncle] sent material support, food items, etc., on a vehicle. That ration saw us through for many days. He also called us to stay at his place but I didn't go. I said that the event had affected the entire village in a tragic manner and therefore, we shall stay in the village itself. I thanked him for all his help. We have neither money nor a house. But, we have *vayavahar* [good heart and behavior]. So, whenever we seek any support, we get it from our villagers.

Continuing bond revalidating the self. As in case of Nirmala Ben, I asked Meghraj Bhai whether he felt like avoiding interactions with me, as these might have reminded him of his loss in the disaster. He replied,

It is so heartening that there is someone to listen to me. Talking to you I am all the more resolved about facing the difficult time with all my efforts. I feel strengthened from within as I discuss with you about carrying out my karma to face our sorrow.

In Phase II, too, he met us with grace on his face and soon we realized why he radiated the vibrations of dutifulness and selflessness. He told us,

My health has improved quite a bit. Medicine has worked. It gives me satisfaction that with hard work, I have paid back Rs. 5,000 [equivalent of about \$100 US] out of Rs. 23,000 [equivalent of about \$460 US] which I had incurred as debt. I have faith in God. He has supported me to gather courage to do my duties even in the face of crisis.

In Phase III, as he informed me, he had the marriage of his sister arranged. Good monsoon rains in the district had resulted in good crops for him. Besides this, from his tailoring job and other work as a manual laborer he was able to earn a good amount of money to sustain the livelihood of his family. He shared, "I have peace of mind as I am able to take care of my family."

Vignette 3: Naresh Bhai

Naresh Bhai, a 28-year-old farmer with a *vari* (a farm with an electric pump to draw groundwater for irrigation), had lost his 4-year-old son and 70-year-old mother in the earthquake. Sudhhakar Bhai had briefed me that Naresh Bhai was a very hardworking farmer, and this also showed in good crops he had been able to generate from his *vari*.

Getting overwhelmed while verbalizing suffering. When I met him at his house, he was looking sad and disheartened. He lit the kerosene-fueled lantern, as the electricity had just gone off. He greeted us gently, and knowing the purpose of our interview, he readily agreed to share whatever he could with us. He began with narrating his experiences related to the event:

That day, I was at my *vari*. When I came home, I saw everyone crying. Nobody was in his senses. Everyone was submerged in trauma that had struck them. For the first month, I was very sad. Even today, when they [the deceased members] are remembered, I feel sad.

While he was speaking, his eyes gradually became moist.

Search for the cultural meaning of the research relationship. After a pause (in the same interview), I asked him about his source of emotional strength, and he said, “Those, who came to be with us at that time, consoled us. Close relatives like you used to come and console us.”

Piecing together of self through interviewing. He continued in the same interview, “This really strengthened me from within. Whatever had to happen has already happened. I have complete faith in the God.” It was heartening for me to see Naresh Bhai’s resolve. Our conversation, besides his cultural beliefs, too, contributed to his finding coherence in his feelings.

Reaffirmation of moral status. In Phase II, it so happened that despite our several attempts to meet him at his house, we could not do so. When I was sitting at Sudhakar Bhai’s place, Naresh Bhai came and met us, expressing his regret about not meeting us before. About his current life condition, he shared,

Currently, I feel having better peace of mind than the last time when you met me. I am not as sad as before. By the God’s grace, crops have been better this year. *Bhai* [brother], I had told you in our last meeting, didn’t I, that whatever had to happen has happened. There are certain things which are not in our hands and only God can take care of that. But, we have our karma in our hands. Doing our karma has given us some peace of mind.

Clearly, this time Naresh Bhai was sharing with enthusiasm that he had stuck to his sociomoral belief of carrying his karma. Narrating this gave value to his experience.

Continuing bond revalidating the self. In Phase III he expressed having peace of mind, as his family members were having good health and he also had a newborn baby in his family. Before leaving his house, he shared, “You told us last time that you would come again this year. You have fulfilled your promise. I really feel good about it.” I also explained to him that it was fulfilling for me to see him in good health.

Vignette 4: Jayendra Bhai

Search for the cultural meaning of the research relationship.

You are the first person who has come to understand our state of mind and experiences after the earthquake. Until now, no person or organization

has come to listen to our experiences of sorrow. . . . We shall eventually rebuild our damaged houses but we need people who can share our agony.

Jayendra Bhai, a 51-year-old farmer with a vari, who lost his mother in the earthquake, certainly needed an acknowledgment for his sorrow through his sharing. As informed by Sudhakar Bhai, he was also a religious person and very active in motivating people to have faith in God, as the path shown by Him would lead them to peace of mind.

Getting overwhelmed while verbalizing suffering. He started sharing spontaneously about the tragic event when I initiated a conversation with him by asking him about his current life condition:

That day, I was on my way to the vari when this event occurred. Both my children had gone to the high school for the program of 26 January [Republic Day of India]. Only my mother was at my home during that time. When I recalled that the cot on which mother was lying was near a wall, I returned home running, but it was too late. Half of the wall had fallen on my mother.

He paused for a few moments while he slowly took deep breaths, with tears in his eyes.

Piecing together of self through interviewing. He continued to share when I inquired about the values his mother had imparted to him:

I must have done less *punya* [righteous deeds in accordance with karma]; that is why the punishment came on my mother. Had I done sufficient amount of *punya*, my mother must have been saved. We must have fallen short in our duties; that is why this event has occurred in our region and village. However, my mother was a pious soul. As my elder daughter was telling you, just one day before the event, her grandmother was telling that we must give one 100-kilogram sack full of millet to feed birds. She gave birth to me. I miss her.

Although he felt guilt, attributing the death of his mother to his nonadherence to the sociomoral belief of karma, he held his late mother in high esteem, stating that his mother never deviated from the path of karma.

Reaffirmation of moral status. He asserted his resolve to live his life according to the path of karma as he continued to share his feelings:

I have faith in God. He is the source of inspiration. One does not get life as a human being easily. Once this life is completed, you do not easily get

the life as a human being. Therefore, to earn punya, I labor hard.

In Phase II, he shared with enthusiasm,

You tell me how I am after one year. I told you last time, didn't I, that only our karma is in our hands and through our karma only we can do something good toward ourselves and the world. When I am reminded of my mother, I am more inspired to do my karma rather than being sad. Even in this difficult time, my mother inspires me to labor hard at my work as much as possible.

Besides affirming his moral status by following his life according to karma, he clearly showed that he was developing for himself a more enabling meaning out of love for his mother. He had transformed himself following the sage lesson learned from the death of his mother.

Continuing bond revalidating the self. In Phase III, too, Jayendra Bhai shared having peace of mind over the good health of his family and a fulfilling social life in the village. He shared, "You were with us during difficult times of our lives. Your being here reminded us that people are there to care for us." I also shared my gratitude toward him and others who made me realize the meaning of resilience during crisis.

Discussion

I present below the theoretical relevance of the categories that emerged through analysis of the process of the research relationship facilitating the remoralization and self-growth among the research participants.

Getting Overwhelmed While Verbalizing Suffering

The four vignettes indicate participants getting overwhelmed by the experience of grief while attempting to verbalize their experience of loss and trauma in the initial interview. They had tears in their eyes while attempting to narrate their experience of loss of family members. In Vignettes 1 and 2, the participants' voices choked while speaking. Minutes of silence followed, during which I was trying to be with them existentially (Kleinman, 1988a). Morse, Beres, Spiers, Mayan, and Olson (2003) also found a cracked voice, crying, and suffering expressions associated with emotional suffering. Particularly in Vignette 1, the participant could not speak beyond a few words before she was overwhelmed by the intensity of her feelings associated with the loss of her husband. Charmaz (2002) stated the nature of such an intense experience: "When suffering

feels inchoate, incomprehensible—overpowering—events may shoot by before being grasped. Here, suffering lies beyond words—what can one say?" (p. 310).

In stages of grief, as described by Kessler and Kubler-Ross (2005), the world appears meaningless and without any order when one experiences suffering. Suffering damages intersubjective connections (Kleinman et al., 1998), and this condition appears to be synonymous with discontinuity of meaning in life between past, present, and future (Dwivedi & Gardner, 1997). As Charmaz (2002) and Kessler and Kubler-Ross (2005) noted, such an experience becomes incomprehensible and can also have an overpowering or overwhelming impact on the person. However, Kessler and Kubler-Ross (2005) pointed out that depression, as one of the stages of grief, also represents the person's need and attempt to initiate order or meaning amidst chaotic and overwhelming experiences. This could be observed in Meghraj Bhai's (Vignette 2) way of sharing spontaneously about his experiences of loss without actually being specifically asked about it. As Morse and Penrod (1999) pointed out, while undergoing emotional suffering a person might seek commiseration in the form of informal support from others who have undergone a similar crisis situation in their lives.

Search for the Cultural Meaning of the Research Relationship

As Frank (2000) pointed out, the purpose of storytelling for a participant is relationship building. While the research communication progressed, the participants were also simultaneously defining the newly formed relationship with me. MacIntyre (1985) and Dwivedi and Gardner (1997) pointed out the role of culture in narrating one's experience. It was apparent that the participants were trying to figure out the nature of this new research relationship with me according to their cultural interpretation. As evident in Vignette 1, Niramala Ben took me to be her guest toward whom she had to perform her karma. The participants in Vignettes 2, 3, and 4 related with me, taking me as a "good human being," "someone like a close relative," and "the one who could listen with concern," respectively. It is also evident from the vignettes that as the research communication continued, it led to a more humanizing relationship in which the participants could share their experiences spontaneously, as they could relate to me as a trustworthy listener, friend, or helper. Such a humanizing relationship is a necessary condition for the remoralization that is possible in research on the human experience of illness and suffering (Dwivedi and Gardner, 1997; Frank, 2000; Kleinman, 1988a; Roberts, 1994).

Piecing Together of Self Through Interviewing

In the initial interactions, when the participants had the feeling of being overwhelmed by the intensity of suffering because of loss of family members, I had to guide the flow of sharing by the participant in the direction of their enabling thoughts, experiences, or resources perceived during crisis. I did that by guiding the participant to explore the resources that helped in taking care of themselves and their family members (Vignette 2), their source of emotional strength (Vignette 3), and the values imparted by parents (Vignette 4). Stuhlmiller (2001) stated the potential of skillful interviewing to create order or continuity out of discontinuity of experience produced by suffering. As apparent from the vignettes, participants responded in such guided explorations by sharing enabling and encouraging aspects of their experience, such as acknowledgment of help received during crisis (Vignette 2), motivation to nurture family members and faith in God (Vignette 3), and the righteousness Jayendra Bhai's mother stood for (Vignette 4).

Providing an experiential space where a participant can talk about the secure phases and areas of his or her life while he or she has an overwhelming experience of suffering is termed by Rosenthal (2003) as *narrating one out of the situation*. Thus, interviewing has the potential to facilitate piecing together of self through directing a participant's verbalization that provides him or her a sense of coherence and worth out of incomprehensible or overwhelming feelings (Brison, 1997; Charmaz, 1999; Colbourne & Sque, 2005; Ellingson, 1998; Kleinman, 1988a; Rosenthal, 2003; Stuhlmiller, 2001). Besides skillful interviewing, it might be noticed that the participants' cultural beliefs in karma also played a role in piecing together of their selves. As Kleinman (1988b) and McIntyre (1985) pointed out, cultural beliefs and symbols further help the narrator obtain meaning and value for one's experience.

Reaffirmation of Moral Status

Being taken as a trustworthy listener helped me to facilitate building of participants' narratives associated with the traumatic event, and it led to the reaffirmation of their moral status. It might be noticed that the cultural beliefs and discourse through which research participants narrated their experience led to this process (Dwivedi & Gardner, 1997; Frank, 2000; Kleinman, 1988a). Lewis-Fernandez and Kleinman (1994) and Schweder (1991) pointed out that, particularly in non-Western cultures, people's experiences are guided more by sociocentric beliefs of self and well-being. This was reflected in the participants' sharing their new meaning in life, achieved through engaging in a holy work (e.g., satsang), looking

after family members (nephews; Vignette 1), and having strong affiliation with villagers and being perceived by them as having a "good heart and behavior" (Vignette 2). Furthermore, reaffirmation of moral status might also be extended to feelings of heroism and self-growth, or developing an enabling meaning for self through a socio-moral belief such as karma.

Naresh Bhai's enthusiastic sharing (Vignette 3) about how putting the belief of karma into practice in his daily life gave him peace of mind indicates a feeling of "heroism" associated with adhering to and finding solace in a socio-moral belief shared in a community. Charmaz (1999) pointed out:

A story of the past differs from a story unfolding in the present. The storyteller has a different stake in the outcome and in the audience. He or she can reconstruct a story of suffering so that it reflects heroism without contamination. Then any hint of past suffering contrasts with the current portrayal of self. The person remains in control; the self remains intact and untouched by suffering. Here, the person not only preserves moral status but may claim moral *superiority* for remaining in control and not caving in to suffering. (p. 371, emphasis added)

Jayendra Bhai (Vignette 4) felt inspired to do his best toward his family and community after his mother's death (rather than being sad), as the memories of his mother reminded him of his karma. Charmaz (1999) observed,

Stories of suffering evoke reflection, reevaluation, and redirection. They contain wisdom and provide lessons in living. These respondents' stories may have begun with claims for moral rights and moral status, but they end with sage advice and moral principles. (p. 373)

Jayendra Bhai had developed an enabling meaning for himself following the sage lesson learned from the death of his mother (Charmaz, 1999; Kessler & Kubler-Ross, 2005; Kleinman, 1988a).

Continuing Bond Revalidating the Self

A storyteller seeks commonality of experience or empathy while sharing his or her story (Frank, 2000). In a similar vein, Stuhlmiller (2001) stated that the purpose of narrating one's life experience is to make social connections that might provide validation and value to experience. The interactions with participants showed to have facilitated

the process of remoralization of their experience. In the final interviews with them, I noticed revalidation of their experience as they expressed their experience of “relief and comfort,” “being strengthened after he was listened to,” “feeling good as I fulfilled my promise of meeting them,” and “peace of mind.” Sque (2000) and Kiesinger (1998) had similar observations of their participants feeling relieved and comfortable while being interviewed about the experiences of suffering, despite their concern that their participants might feel sad talking about their suffering and therefore avoid it.

Before coming to the village for fieldwork, when I was gathering courage to listen to the survivors’ experiences of suffering, and during Phase I when I used to swing between a sense of fulfillment out of some participants’ meaningful reconstruction of their selves and a sense of despair out of some participants’ grief, I had not even imagined that one of the participants, Nirmala Ben would show her bonding with me using the expression, “Tamne avavuj padshe” [“You shall have to come”], smilingly and emphatically, at the end of my fieldwork. The realization that a survivor needs an acknowledgment of his or her suffering (Cartwright & Limandri, 1997; Morse, 1994), and that research through empathic witnessing might facilitate a suffering person’s endeavors to make sense of and give value to his or her experience (Ellingson, 1998; Frank, 2000; Kleinman, 1988a, 1988b), becomes fresh in my mind whenever I am reminded of this statement by Nirmala Ben.

Remoralization During Research: Commonalities With Therapy and Grieving

The key to effective psychosocial care is the sincere attempts by caregivers like doctors, nurses, therapists, or healers to appreciate and approximate the sick person’s experience from the sufferers’ perspective or the explanatory model of illness or suffering (Kleinman, 1988a; Peplau, 1997; Spiro, 1986). Therefore, how the research relationship facilitates remoralization and self-growth has several commonalities with the process of achieving remoralization of a sufferer through a doctor’s or a healer’s empathic witnessing (Kleinman, 1988a; 1988b) and a nurse’s therapeutic use of her self (Peplau, 1997).

Kleinman’s (1988a) emphasis on empathic witnessing or existential commitment to be with the person (patient) is crucial, not only in the medical setting (for the patient’s care or remoralization), but also in a research relationship, as we have noticed; the research participants tend to figure out the cultural meaning of the research relationship that forms the foundation for further research interaction. Another commonality between patients’ and participants’ remoralization is piecing together of self through interviewing, where the patient’s interpretation

of the life story or the experiences of suffering are validated and their value is affirmed. Finally, the salient role that cultural beliefs or symbols play in Kleinman’s (1988b) concept of symbolic healing is also reflected in piecing together of self through interviewing and reaffirmation of moral status.

There are similarities between Peplau’s (1997) stages of “therapeutic use of self” in nursing and the categories of the process of the research relationship facilitating participants’ remoralization. Preoccupations with and stereotypes about one another (patient–nurse) in the *orientation phase* seems to be similar to the process of the search for the cultural meaning of the research relationship. The *working phase*, in which the patient opens up to the nurse about his her problems and might develop self-understanding, appears to be similar to piecing together of self through interviewing and reaffirmation of moral status. The *termination phase* prepares the patient and the nurse to dissolve the professional relationship, and it might also be understood as the completion of the process of continuing bond revalidating the self.

Furthermore, Kessler and Kubler-Ross (2005) illustrated how grief is a process of healing, and the five stages (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance) actually represent a grieving person’s gradual movement toward finding meaning and solace out of meaninglessness and a state of being overwhelmed that result because of the loss of a near and dear one. In essence, the research relationship, as illustrated in this article, facilitates a similar phenomenon through its experiential space. For example, denial and depression as stages of grief not only represent a condition of being overwhelmed by suffering, but also an attempt to create order out of meaninglessness. These stages, thus, are close to the experience of getting overwhelmed while verbalizing suffering, although depression does not necessarily require verbalization of the experience according to the theory. Bargaining as a way to negotiate one’s way out of hurt might also be seen as an aspect of piecing together of self. Finally, acceptance is a stage in which the person learns to live with a newly created resolve or norm that might indicate transformation, growth, and evolution in the person. This stage comes close to the process of developing an enabling meaning for oneself as an aspect of the process of reaffirmation of moral status.

Reflections on Healing Myself: Participants’ Contribution

I go back now to my first interaction with Nirmala Ben in Phase I (Vignette 1), during which she could barely speak a sentence. The intensity and nature of pain contained in that one sentence from Nirmala Ben was much greater

than any intensity of pain I have ever faced. I confess that it was extremely difficult for me to empathize with the agony she was undergoing. Her sorrow and silence made me once again feel the sorrow and loneliness that I had felt when my mother was seriously ill (and had to be hospitalized in a different town) after the death of my eldest brother in 1982. I was 5 or 6 years old then. I, along with my elder brother and sister, was sent to my maternal grandmother's house. Every now and then, we used to be horrified by the news that my mother's condition was critical. We were told that she might not stay alive. It was strange and difficult to even imagine it. It took my mother almost a year to recover from meningitis, and another year to completely recover from the partial loss of memory resulting from the disease and its treatment. I do not remember myself crying at that time, but I can still feel the loneliness and peculiar sense of meaninglessness associated with that time. Today, she is with us as a source of strength. Perhaps a strong family bond has motivated her to live gracefully, even with the practical difficulties associated with having no voluntary control over urination, a side effect of the treatment of meningitis.

This interaction with Nirmala Ben made me realize the "littleness" of my suffering in life. Never in the past has a recollection of the above-mentioned troubled phase of my childhood had a positive influence on me as it did on this occasion. I thought if Nirmala Ben had emerged out of a traumatic situation with a new meaning in life, let me (being better off than she, as I have not faced the loss she had) continue with much more vigor than ever before to contribute to the lives of people needing help or a listening ear. This piecing together of my past and present facilitated by the interaction with her also reaffirmed my belief in existentialism, which has been a source of my moral strength. As noted above, the research interaction might serve the same purpose of finding resonance of his or her experiences for the researcher, and this might lead to his or her reconstruction or remoralization of self. Ellingson (1998) reflected,

As I compare and contrast my illness narratives with those of the patients, I see my pain in theirs, and I can write about the emotions of cancer reflected in this joint construction. . . . I write myself as I write others; I heal myself as I try to help others through my stories, enacting the "therapeutic function" of autoethnography. (Gravel, 1997 p. 510)

I write below of another contribution of a participant in my life, who inspired me to develop a novel meaning of my self.

Reflections on Inspiring My Growth: Participants' Contribution

Paras Bhai, a 42-year-old farmer with *sukhi kheti* (farming in which irrigation is dependent completely on rainwater), had lost his 13-year-old daughter in the earthquake. Paras Bhai had received Rs. 80,000 (equivalent of about \$1600 US) as compensation for the death of his daughter. I was filled with a sense of reverence for him when I came to know that he had added Rs. 20,000 (equivalent of about \$400 US) to the amount received as compensation, and spent that entire amount in rebuilding the bus stop of the village that was completely damaged in the earthquake. He told us that the money he got as compensation was not earned by him, therefore he didn't want to use it for himself, and because the money was associated with the death of his daughter, therefore, he wanted to spend it for some good cause. He said,

My daughter Tuli Ben was very dear to me. She is no more here physically with me but she still inspires me to do my karma, which is meant to do good to all the people around us. So, she has inspired me to build this bus stop.

In Phase III, during our interaction, Paras Bhai reiterated the change in his approach to life that was brought about by the death of his daughter in the earthquake. He said,

The death of my beloved daughter showed to me that our lives and those of our loved ones won't last forever. Therefore, the time we have in this world, we must try to do whatever we can for society and humanity. That is real *prem* [compassion]. Building the bus stop for the village is a small step in that direction.

Paras Bhai made me realize how our loved ones have a lasting calming effect on us. Our relatedness (because of which we feel pain when our related ones suffer) gives us an intense feeling that we, by nature, want to relate, as it gives us an authentic feeling. Such a feeling also makes us realize that our loved ones, too, are constituted of the same energy or consciousness that constitutes all forms of nature. Paras Bhai was inspired by his late daughter to relate to other beings of nature. Today, when I try to contribute my bit (whatever little I can) to humanity through my research or otherwise, I feel a sense of being with my mother that gives me calmness and spontaneity. I feel my boundary of *I* (for which my search for an authentic meaning had been going according to my belief in existentialism) has been expanded,¹⁰ as I feel oneness with all forms of nature, and it has made the ups and downs of life worth

living. Reed (1992) pointed out that such a connectedness with a purpose greater than the self is an empowering experience. This oneness has also been understood in literature as “wholeness” (transcending *I*, or ego, and feeling no separation between oneself and rest of the universe or cosmos), as an experience of healing or health (Dethlefsen & Dahlke, 1995; Jensen & Allen, 1994; Pachuta, 1996; Paranjpe, 1998; Reed & Runquist, 2007; Sinha, 1990).

Concluding Comments

In this article I have illustrated the humanizing potential of new-paradigm research that might facilitate healing and self-growth of both research participants and the researchers. I presented a constructionist grounded theory analysis of participants’ (recovering from the impact of a traumatic event) narratives and my participant observation fieldnotes that provided an insight into more-or-less sequential (but overlapping) components of this process, represented in the five categories discussed above. I also illustrated the healing and growth-inducing impact of the research relationship on me through my reflections on how it gave a new and enabling meaning to my crisis and inspired my own self-transformation. Kleinman (1988b) pointed out that any healing system, including modern psychotherapy, is hinged on remoralization of a person that takes place in the presence of a trustworthy listener through the remaking of the meaning of life situation aided by cultural beliefs and symbols. Kleinman (1988a) explained the same in the context of his concern for patients’ healing in the medical setting:

Whatever else it is, psychotherapy is a deeply moral relationship. The practitioner attempts to be with the patient in the ambit of suffering. The patient actively opens his life world to their conjoint exploration. Practitioner becomes a moral witness, neither a judge nor a manipulator. Patient becomes an active colleague, not a passive recipient. Both learn and change from the experience. . . . When the tasks of support, attention to emotional needs, and negotiation of an authentic relationship are accomplished in a caring fashion the question of how to do medical psychotherapy vanishes. That is psychotherapy. (p. 246)

Taking this meaning of healing system and psychotherapy into account, qualitative researchers might note that the research relationship that becomes the domain for empathic witnessing by the researcher, and which facilitates retrospective narration and thereby remoralization, might be no less effective than a healing system. New-paradigm research invites researchers to explore with commitment and patience its inherent humanizing and healing potential.

This might facilitate not only overcoming apparent risks of emotional distress when experiences are shared during research interactions, but also the process of remoralization and self-growth for the researcher and the participants.

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Notes

1. See Heron and Reason (1997) for details on this.
2. Negative emotional effects of qualitative research (and ways proposed to deal with these difficulties) have also been noted by qualitative researchers (see Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007).
3. Here, I must add that I adhere to the thesis of Lincoln and Guba (2000) that even in a qualitative research of constructionist orientation, axiology (concern for human healing and self-growth of research participants) is an important issue that is a prerequisite for its methodology.
4. An existential crisis is a feeling of extreme anxiety associated with the crumbling of all the categories or schemas through which one understands the world and lives in it when one experiences unsettling societal changes or a situation incurring one’s possible physical death or extreme psychological trauma.
5. In contemporary times, when societies are rapidly changing and youth is seeking more autonomy in making important decisions in their lives, it remains as a social norm in most of the Hindu societies of India that parents of a girl of marriageable age have to select the bridegroom for their daughter rather than the girl deciding about her own match. It gives an undue upper hand to the groom’s family to scrutinize the bride’s family in terms of its education, socioeconomic status, and so forth, because the former knows about the latter’s higher stake in the marriage. The fear for

the girl's family is that if she is not found "suitable" by a groom's family by the age of 30, the unmarried girl would be considered as a taboo by the society.

6. Certain professions like engineering, medicine, civil services, and of late, management and defense, are socially accepted as the worth-going-for careers (and prestigious, too) in most parts of India. I faced the same social pressure, and it was tough and emotionally draining to resist it and carry on with a "deviant" profession of research and teaching in social sciences.
7. This rehabilitation project, called the UDAI Project, was participated in by groups consisting of a faculty member (coordinator) and 15 to 20 volunteer students for periods of 15 days at a time. The Project was run from April 2001, to January, 2002, and its focus was to coordinate with local resource persons to facilitate rehabilitation related to health, psychosocial care, earthquake-resistant housing, sanitation, and so forth. The expenses of this project were met with the charitable donations made by faculty members and students of the University of Delhi.
8. Charmaz (1995, 2000, 2001, 2006) indicated that in contemporary social science research, the use of grounded theory itself has undergone a paradigm shift from positivism toward social constructionism. This shift has enabled the use of grounded theory not just for the development of substantive or formal theory, but to understand the mysteries and puzzles of lived experience by their meaningful conceptual analysis (Charmaz, 1995).
9. The ages of the participants mentioned in this article correspond to December 2001.
10. Such a transcendence of *I*, or ego, as a consequence of conducting qualitative research among people in crisis situations might also be observed in the work of Rosenblatt (2001).

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Bio

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