
1-1-1991

Bradford Keeney's Cybernetic Project and the Creation of Recursive Frame Analysis

Ronald J. Chenail

Nova Southeastern University, ron@nsu.acast.nova.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>

 Part of the [Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons](#), and the [Social Statistics Commons](#)

Recommended APA Citation

Chenail, R. J. (1991). Bradford Keeney's Cybernetic Project and the Creation of Recursive Frame Analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 1(2), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/1991.2042>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact nsuworks@nova.edu.



Qualitative Research Graduate Certificate
Indulge in Culture
Exclusively Online • 18 Credits

LEARN MORE

NSU
NOVA SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN

Bradford Keeney's Cybernetic Project and the Creation of Recursive Frame Analysis

Keywords

cybernetic

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Bradford Keeney's Cybernetic Project and the Creation of Recursive Frame Analysis

by Ronald J. Chenail

The Qualitative Report, Volume 1, Numbers 2 and 3, Winter/Spring, 1990/1991

Introduction

The major focus of this paper is on Bradford Keeney's (e.g., 1983) Cybernetic Project in the context of systemic family therapy and how this juxtaposition has led to the creation of a new method called Recursive Frame Analysis or RFA (e.g., Chenail, 1991b; Keeney, 1991). But, before that story can be told, another tale must be heard -- and that is a narrative on clinical qualitative research or, to paraphrase Warren McCulloch (1961/1965), "What is a world, that it may know therapists, and therapists, that they may know a world?"

Clinical Qualitative Research

In the development of family therapy, there have been a number of influential clinical qualitative research projects (Chenail, 1992) in which researchers and therapists have imaginatively, intuitively, rigorously, and relevantly explored the application of metaphor in the study of clinical practice and theory. On one hand, these clinical projects share many similarities with other types of qualitative research, like the scientific and artistic approaches (Chenail, 1992; Eisner, 1981; Smith, 1987) in the way description, interpretation, discovery, observation, and questioning are stressed. On the other hand, clinical qualitative research differs greatly from the scientific and artistic types in that, where scientific qualitative research is based upon a scientist's way of thinking and doing, and artistic qualitative research embraces an artist's way in the world, clinical qualitative research may be conducted from a therapist's way of acting and knowing, or may be focused on learning more about a therapist's way of practicing and thinking in the world. Although therapists may be scientific and/or artistic in their work, performing in the context of the clinic shapes these ways of science and art into unique forms particular and peculiar only to clinicians' ways of working (see Erikson, 1958).

All of the clinical explorers discussed in this paper have one fascination in common: They were curious about the ways of therapy and therapists, and set about the task of learning how therapists learn and act. These explorations all were conducted through the rigorous application of metaphor to the study of therapy and therapists. In choosing and applying these metaphors (e.g., cybernetics, transformational grammar, communication theory, etc.), these investigators had to follow three crucial guidelines of logos, rhetoric, and aesthetics: Does it make sense to juxtapose this metaphor with this phenomenon? Will the results be persuasive or compelling to both researcher and therapist alike? Will the patterns of the lens that I am using and the phenomenon I am studying connect?

In each of the cases discussed below, the investigators effectively applied their metaphors, and in their respective clinical qualitative research projects, they produced new ways of conducting therapy, as well as new ways of practicing research, all from exploring the variety of ways in which therapists know and act in their world. Four notable endeavors in this vein have been the Double Bind Project- Mental Research Institute work of Gregory Bateson, Don Jackson, Jay Haley, John Weakland, William Fry, Virginia Satir, Paul Watzlawick, Richard Fisch, Arthur Bodin, and others; Richard Bandler's and John Grinder's Neuro-Linguistic Programming; the Milan Therapy-Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) conference; and Bradford Keeney's cybernetic project.

Three Clinical Qualitative Research Ways

From the Bateson Double Bind project's (see Bateson, 1972) rigorous study of Don Jackson's post-psychoanalytic work, Milton Erickson's clinical hypnosis, John Rosen's direct analysis, and other clinical approaches from a Batesonian communication perspective, came a number of new ideas for research and therapy. Many of these research notions were spelled out in Bateson's (1972, 1979) own work, as well as in the widely used communication book, *Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes* (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). A maturation of these ideas as applied to therapy can be found in books like *Change: Principles of Problem Formation and Problem Resolution* (Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974), and in the collected writings of the therapists and researchers of the Mental Research Institute (Watzlawick & Weakland, 1977). One of the best known of these MRI therapy models was the Brief Therapy Model presented in the Weakland, Fisch, Watzlawick, and Bodin (1974) paper, and the book, *The Tactics of Change: Doing Therapy Briefly* (Fisch, Weakland, & Segal, 1982).

In the Bandler and Grinder studies, a close scrutiny of the work of Virginia Satir, Milton Erickson, and others (Davis & Davis, 1982) from a linguistics and language metaphor (e.g., transformational grammar) led to a new qualitative research method connected with the transformational grammar tradition, but different, and to a different therapy model which embraced some of the Satir-Erickson style of clinical practice, but added some interesting meta-communicative distinctions. The research method was presented as a formal notational system in *The Structure of Magic II: A Book about Communication & Change* (Grinder & Bandler, 1976, pp. 164-193), but was never fully realized as a distinct research approach, partly due to Bandler's and Grinder's emphasis on their therapy model. This new clinical approach, Neuro-Linguistic Programming, was explicated in numerous works such as *The Structure of Magic: A Book about Language & Therapy* (Bandler & Grinder, 1975), *Frogs into Princes* (Bandler & Grinder, 1979) and *Trance-formations: Neuro-Linguistic Programming and the Structure of Hypnosis* (Grinder & Bandler, 1981) and has reached a notable level of popularity in the clinical fields.

In the Milan-CMM project, Karl Tomm put together a conference in 1982 at the University of Calgary which allowed for an interesting exchange between a group of Milan-style therapists (e.g., Gianfranco Cecchin, Luigi Boscolo, and Tomm himself) and a number of communication theorists and researchers from the Coordinated Management of Meaning project (e.g., Vernon Cronen, W. Barnett Pearce, John Lannamann, and Sheila McNamee) (McNamee, Lannamann, & Tomm, 1983). This meeting led to a number of projects and papers created from a juxtaposition

of the circular notions of Milan therapy (e.g., Selvini-Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin, & Prata, 1980) with the circularity of communication approach of CMM (Cronen, Johnson, & Lannamann, 1982; Pearce & Cronen, 1980). As a result, Milan-style circularity in therapy took a reflexive turn evident in Tomm's subsequent work (1987a, 1987b, 1988) and a turn towards curiosity exemplified in Cecchin's therapy (1987). As for a change in research, the notion of questions as interventions in therapy (Tomm & Lannamann, 1988) helped lead to the suggestion that research questions may also be seen as interventions and, possibly, as therapy (McNamee, 1988).

Keeney's Cybernetic Project

In a Batesonian-style metalogue with James Morris, Bradford Keeney gave a short and concise description of his extensive clinical qualitative research into therapeutic practice: "My own work concerns the development of cybernetic ethnographies of communication in the context of systemic therapy" (Keeney & Morris, 1985, p. 102; see also Keeney & Thomas, 1986, p. 283). From some of his earliest published papers (e.g., Keeney, 1979, 1982a, 1982b; Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982) to the present, Keeney has explored the many varied possibilities of a cybernetic understanding of discourse. The juxtaposition of a science of patterns (i.e., cybernetics) to study a practice of patterns (i.e., systemic family therapies) made good sense to Keeney. This juxtaposition also allowed for a connecting of patterns common to all three parties concerned (i.e., cybernetics, systemic family therapy, and Keeney), a collective heritage with Gregory Bateson's work (1972, 1979).

Keeney first began to articulate his rigorous application of cybernetic metaphors to the study of systemic family therapies in a series of papers (e.g., Keeney, 1979, 1982a, 1982b; Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982) and soon reached a fruition of these ideas in his book, *Aesthetics of Change* (Keeney, 1983). Along with concepts drawn from epistemology and aesthetics, Keeney systematically studied the "thisness" of therapy from the "thatness" of cybernetics (Burke, 1945/1969, p. 503), and vice versa:

(Cybernetic / Systemic Family Therapy)

From this process, Keeney derived a series of distinctions which would allow therapists and researchers to describe interactional patterns in therapeutic discourse and to guide their practice in therapy. These cybernetic-informed discriminations or dialectics included "stability," "change," and "meaningful Rorschach" (Keeney, 1983, pp. 176-180; Keeney & Ross, 1985, pp. 50-53), the latter of which was changed to "meaningful noise" in the Keeney and Ross (1985, p. 52) book. Whereas the meanings of "stability" (i.e., how meanings or actions remain the same over time), and "change" (i.e., how meanings or actions alter over time) are self-evident, "meaningful noise" had a definition specific to Keeney's understanding of how meaning is created in language or behavior: "...communication punctuated by an observing system. What is 'meaningful' arises from the action of a particular observer" (Keeney & Ross, 1985, p. 52).

Another set of distinctions described in *Aesthetics* was "orders of recursion" (Keeney, 1983, pp. 87-92). These orders of recursion consisted of three dialectical levels: (a) first-order reality or simple behavior, (b) second-order reality or interaction, and (c) third-order reality or social

ecology or choreography (Keeney, 1990, p. 246). These dialectics were based upon Bateson's (1979) notion that "procedures of inquiry were punctuated by an alternation between classification and the description of process" (p. 193). In Keeney's version of the Batesonian ladder, observers in their observations can zig-zag between classification of form (i.e., categories of action, interaction, or social choreography) or description of process (i.e., descriptions action, interaction, or choreography) on any of the three levels of reality or recursion: behavior, context, or metacontext (Keeney, 1983, pp. 40-41).

Later, in his work with Jeffrey Ross (1985), *Mind in Therapy: Constructing Systemic Family Therapies*, Keeney added another dialectical distinction to his cybernetic map of systemic therapy: "semantic" and "political" distinctions of information (Keeney & Ross, 1985, pp. 13-21). For Keeney, "semantic" was the word which addressed the classification side of the Batesonian dialectic: "the name of a communicational frame of reference wherein meanings are requested and constructed" (Keeney, 1990, p. 242). For the description side, he used the word "political" and defined it as "the name of a communicational frame of reference that principally attends to the specification of `who is doing what to whom when, where, and how'" (Keeney, 1990, p. 242).

With this well-connected system of simple cybernetic distinctions, Keeney was able to re-construct and re-present a number of systemic family therapists' styles and patterns through close examination of their therapeutic discourse, and to generate innovative improvisations of therapy (Keeney, 1987a) from his clinically-informed cybernetic lens:

[(Cybernetic / Systemic Therapy Family) / (Systemic Family Therapy / Discourse)]

For example, consider this scenario: a therapist told a husband and wife the following, "Because you've both done so well, I would like for the two of you to continue working together, but now I would like for one of you, on even-numbered days, to be the first to say, 'Let's start the project,' and for the other one, on odd-numbered days, to say, 'Let's start the project.'" A Keeney-style cybernetic description of the talk could be as follows: The therapist wanted to stabilize ("to continue") a semantic classification ("working") at the interactional level ("the two of you...together") while changing ("but now") a political description ("one of you, on even-numbered days, to be the first to say, 'Let's start the project'" and "the other one, on odd-numbered days, to say, 'Let's start the project'") at the simple action level ("for one of you" and "for the other one"), and the therapist used meaningful noise ("Because you've both done so well") to help persuade the couple to accept the therapeutic description and prescription.

In *Mind in Therapy*, Keeney and Ross (1985) examined clinical sessions of Olga Silverstein, John Weakland, Jay Haley, Charles Fishman, Luigi Boscolo, and Gianfranco Cecchin in the manner described above. Later in *The Therapeutic Voice of Olga Silverstein* (Keeney & Silverstein, 1986), Keeney continued this line of cybernetic inquiry with a full-length case study of Silverstein's work. The density of the analysis in all of these therapists' work, and especially in the Silverstein case, demonstrated the progress Keeney had made with the connectivity properties of the aforementioned simple cybernetic distinctions in studying the intricate patterns of systemic family therapy discourse.

This rather thick description of therapy talk presented some problems. The intricacies of juxtaposing one set of complexities (i.e., the systemic family therapy- informed cybernetic distinctions) with another set of complexities (i.e., the patterns of systemic family therapy discourse) ended up making a map which became more complex than the complex territory it was meant to simplify. As a research method, this phase of Keeney's cybernetic project proved to be an informative descriptive lens, as seen in the works discussed above, and as an effective and innovative method for teaching prescriptive perspectives for therapists (e.g., Keeney, 1987a, 1990). But as a real-time, parsimonious aid to practicing therapists, this cybernetic metaphor became too complex and intricate to be very useful to most clinicians.

Recursive Frame Analysis

Faced with the dilemma of having a system of cybernetic-informed metaphors which on one hand connected well with systemic therapy discourse, but on the other hand, generated extremely complex configurations of this discourse, Keeney re- examined his distinctions, with the practicing therapist in mind, and began to re- configure his approach to these cybernetic ethnographies of communication. In a return to some of his earlier work (see Keeney, 1982b), Keeney went back to writings of the mathematician G. Spencer-Brown (1973) and commenced to play seriously from an applied epistemological position of drawing distinctions in therapeutic discourse (see Chenail, 1991b, pp. 28-29, for further discussion on this process).

The first step in this procedure was to examine the basic formula Keeney had followed during the first phase of his cybernetic project, as depicted above, and to simplify the metaphoric equation by factoring out the redundancy of having systemic family therapy on both sides of the distinction:

[(Cybernetic / Systemic Therapy Family) / (Systemic Family Therapy / Discourse)]

By removing the systemic family therapy constraint or redundancy from his system of drawing distinctions, Keeney was able, in a sense, to move closer to the talk to describe the patterns by not having to "look through" a systemic family therapy filter. This simplification process can be seen as follows:

(Cybernetic / Discourse)

This elementary move helped Keeney refine his lens and led him on path which shaped the creation of a new cybernetic-informed system: Recursive Frame Analysis or RFA (Chenail, 1991b; Keeney, 1991):

(Recursive / Frame Analysis)

In creating this cybernetics of discourse Keeney based his inquiry on an adaptation of the concept of frame as introduced by Gregory Bateson (1956, 1972) and adapted by Erving Goffman (1974). The notion of frame was not new to Keeney's way of discussing discourse (see Keeney, 1983, p. 155, Keeney & Ross, 1984, pp. 88-89, and Keeney & Silverstein, 1986, pp. 9-11), but in the earlier writings, frame was always understood and applied with other contexts as

in the case of "semantic frame" or "political frame." In his move to RFA, instead of contextualizing his notion of frame by embedding it in his semantic and political distinctions, Keeney de-contextualized his way of contextualizing (i.e., from semantic frame or political frame to framing), reduced the complexity of his epistemological metaphor, and allowed for recursion in his cybernetic process in order to examine the complexity of discourse from a simple, parsimonious, and re-contextualized lens:

(semantic frame / political frame) [(frame) / (semantic / political)]

In other words, by treating the relationships of "frame" to "semantic," and "frame" to "political" as one "frame-semantic" distinction or one "frame-political" distinction, a frame, chosen from a text or conversation, already came with its own pre-text context (i.e., political or semantic) or coding system. By focusing and relying on these meta-relationships between different levels of semantic and political distinctions to describe and prescribe therapy in previous works (e.g., Keeney, 1990), Keeney felt that he was being taken away from the text, and from how patterns of text-building (Becker, 1979) or contextualization can be created or discovered in the discourse. As a result of his separation of frames from pre-conversational meta-frames, as seen in the equation above, Keeney was better able to connect frames meta-phorically with other frames within texts.

Keeney then began to explore the viability of studying discourse in terms of describing patterns of these simplified, interacting frames or contexts in the talk. As conversations unfold, text is understood in relationship to other text. The weaving together of texts is what is called "context." Etymologically speaking, the word "context" came from the Latin *contextus* meaning "coherence" or "sequence of words," and from the past participle of *contextere* meaning "to join together" or "to weave" (Morris, 1970, p. 288). By adopting this "context as weaving" orientation, meaning was conceptualized and practiced as a process of contextualization: a joining or weaving together of words. One group of words does not serve as a rigid, hierarchical context for another set of words, but rather, both grouping of words are taken and understood together in a metaphorical and recursive relationship (i.e., in the form of Burke's thisness of a that and thatness of a this) (Burke, 1945/1969, p. 503).

In speaking and in understanding what is spoken, we draw distinctions in talk: Certain words stand out to us; they say something to us. These "words which say something to us" or simply, "sayings" are woven together with other sayings as we construct our meanings in words. Sayings which contextualize with other sayings are in turn contextualized or re-contextualized with themselves in a recursive folding and unfolding of text. Discourse begins to take on shape and meaning as we construct these figures of speech with our choosing of frames. Recursive Frame Analysis is a system that allows speakers and hearers to trace a flow of contexts in a conversation or to use Keeney's musical trope, as "a method of scoring conversations" (Keeney, 1991, p. 40).

This system of noting sayings is similar to the process of taking notes in a class or "highlighting" passages, phrases, or words in a textbook. Each listener or reader draws their distinctions in the words differently. What words one listener in class records as being important and how that person configures the words on the paper (or in their head) to help towards knowing what the

speaker is saying is unique for that listener. Over time, the listener works with these texts-as-notes, continues the conversation with the speaker, and tries to know an other (e.g., a teacher, a client, a research participant, a spouse, a child, a parent, etc.) through a recursive relationship between talking, hearing, noting sayings, and context-building. Every observer will note different patterns of difference in discourse differently and Recursive Frame Analysis is a way to make these patterns overt in relationships over time.

For example, in the following bit of talk, a father is talking about his son, "I'm not sure if I'm making the right decision about his not going to college." From a recursive frame analyst's perspective, a first step would be to select and note some interesting sayings or frames like: "I'm not sure," "making the right decision," and "his not going to college," and a second step would be to play with the sayings to create a variety of figures of speech by juxtaposing one saying with another saying or sayings and see what different shapes of meaning come from these constructions. For instance, would the following figures of speech or contextualizations have different meanings or logics?

1. "I'm not sure" / "making the right decision"
2. "making the right decision" / "his not going to college"
3. "I'm not sure" / "his not going to college"
4. "I'm not sure" / "making the right decision" / "his not going to college"

Keeping with a metaphorical flow of "thisness to that" and "thatness to this," consider the first juxtaposition listed above, there is a "not being sure" of a "making the right decision" contextualization, as well as a "making right decision" about "not being sure" configuration. The two configurations, "not being sure about making the right decision" and "making the right decision about not being sure," seem to be contrasting re-presentations of the talk: Was the father questioning whether he was sure that his decision was right, as in, "I could be wrong about my decision", or could he be asking if he was right to be not sure of the decision, as in, "I could be more certain about my decision"? A researcher or therapist, or any listener, for that matter, might be curious and ask the father which of the two figures best represents the meaning meant by him in the previous talk, and the father just might say, "Both of them!" or he could say, "Neither of them!" The only way to narrow such a gap between a speaker's words and a listener's hearings is through conversation.

An RFA way of playing with talk and silence allows listeners and speakers a variety of ways to try to know another through a participatory relationship in discourse over time, or in Heinz von Foerster (1984, pp. 60-61) language, "Act always so as to increase the number of choices," and "If you desire to see, learn to act." In following such a path, RFA then becomes a contribution to the gap in clinical research and practice described by novelist and language essayist, Walker Percy (1954/1987),

It is a matter for astonishment, when one comes to think of it, how little use linguistics and other sciences of language are to psychiatrists. When one considers that the psychiatrist spends most of his [or her] time listening and talking to patients, one might suppose that there would be such a thing as a basic science of listening-and-talking, as indispensable to psychiatrists as anatomy to surgeons. (p. 159)

He went on to say that "Surgeons traffic in body structures. Psychiatrists traffic in words" (p. 159). What Percy observed in psychiatry holds well for family therapy and other clinical fields, as well as for research of these practices. By allowing observing-participants a way to follow a flow of traffic in talk, RFA enables clinician and clinical researchers alike, to move closer to that which they study and work with in therapy: peoples' attempts to express their lives in language.

Since its creation in 1987 (Keeney, 1987b), RFA has been used as a researching method to study discourse in a variety of contexts: therapy and supervision (Fortugno, 1991, 1991, July; Keeney, 1987b; 1990), domestic violence (Keeney & Bobele, 1989; Stewart & Valentine, 1990, 1991), parents' concern over their children's heart murmurs (Chenail, et al., 1990; Chenail, 1991b), and humor (Chenail, 1991a). An interesting variation on an RFA-style of research, has been applied by Ron Muchnick (1991) in his comparison of the work of George Burns and Gracie Allen with that of Milton Erickson. Muchnick's variation, called Dialectic Frame Analysis (DFA), is based upon a combination of Keeney's cybernetic distinctions (i.e., semantics/politics, stability/change, and levels of simple action/interaction/social choreography) with an RFA framing process. This configuration allows him to compare Burns' and Allen's skill in creating their humor in common, every day interactions, with Erickson's art of constructing therapeutic interventions in his conversations with clients.

Recursive Frame Analysis has also shown great utility and practicality in the construction of unique therapeutic process. Keeney has used RFA in therapy to help with his creation of *Improvisational Therapy* (Keeney, 1991), and Ronald Chenail and his colleagues, Maureen Duffy, Liana Fortugno, and Marilyn Leeds (1991; Fortugno, 1991), have expanded Keeney's RFA notion of weaving (Keeney, 1991, p. 77) to create a way of therapy which embraces a textile metaphor in the knowing and practicing of a frame-guided therapy.

Both the performance of improvisation and weaving, along RFA lines, are based upon a notion of "complex words" (Culler, 1989; Empson, 1951/1989; Miller, 1990). In referring to the notion of complex words, J. Hillis Miller (1990) wrote,

...a narrative, even a long multiplotted novel...with all its wealth and particularity of character, incident, realistic detail, may be an exploration of the resonances of a single "complex word," to borrow William Empson's term for such words. A complex word is in a special sense a figure. It is the locus of a set of perhaps incompatible meanings, bound together by figurative displacements.... In a narrative such a word may be explored by being given contexts or situations in which it may be appropriately used. (p. 77)

With either weaving or improvisation, to paraphrase Jonathan Culler (1989, p. v), therapists and clients attempt to describe and/or prescribe the complexities of meaning words, quite ordinary words, acquire in conversation and life. Meaning emerges from an active playing with and in the talk. To be a recursive frame analyst, you have to get close enough to the language in order to get some words under your fingernails. Rather than bringing a meta-communicative language like "model (of therapy) talk" or "DSM-III-R-isms" to the already complex conversation at hand, improvisationalists or weavers investigate metaphorical relations or figures of speech by working with and within the complex talk they are given, and by exploring endless possibilities of complexities of words and silences in conversation. By doing so, these RFA-informed

researchers and therapists explore metaphorical constructions in conversations, rather than constructing metaphors about conversations.

Instead of having a favored, a priori metaphor from which discourse could be organized, as seen in Freudian approaches (e.g., transference as metaphor), feminist approaches (e.g., power as metaphor), or systemic family therapy (e.g., negative feedback as metaphor), recursive frame analysts attempt to organize their work not from a particular pre-conversational metaphor, but from the metaphorical nature of the talk itself at hand. In following such a path, RFA can be said to be based upon a metaphor as metaphor orientation. This emphasis on process allows for the construction of unique metaphors from each conversation's content. Like dancing with the shadows in Plato's cave, weavers and improvisationalists keep time with the particularities of people's talk of life, by offering figures of speech special to the unfolding shades of difference found in all human conversation.

For example, re-consider the father's talk which was considered above, "I'm not sure if I'm making the right decision about his not going to college." From a metaphor as metaphor perspective, an improvisationalist or a weaver will play with variations of pattern which emerge from making different choices of metaphor construction within the talk at hand. For instance, what if all of the father's talk was understood and woven from a "decision as metaphor" context? There then could be talk about the father's decisions as being certain and uncertain, or his decisions about his son going or not going to college, or even discussions concerning his decisions about his making decisions. As to provide difference while "speaking the client's language," the weaver can then offer this talk, improvised and guided from a "decision as metaphor" perspective, to the father in conversation. The father, in turn, may offer his own variation or improvisation on a "decision talk" theme, and in a to and fro flow of words, a weave is co-constructed and change is begun.

However, maybe the father will not or can not hear or speak his life from a "decision as metaphor" perspective, and therefore will not or can not talk this pattern of talk. Rather than holding on to the one, true metaphor of "decision as metaphor," the weaver must listen for another metaphor in the talk, and there are always other metaphors in the talk! Maybe a more compelling metaphor for the father's talk would be a "being sure as metaphor" pattern? The only way to find out is to continue the conversation and see if a weave of the thisness of the "being sure as metaphor" can be connected with the thatness of the other words being spoken by the therapist and the client.

In the case of this dad's talk about his life, a therapist would follow a "father knows best" way because the father would be the best speaker of his language and experience. And, as the father co-weaves and co-improvises his and the therapist's words and silences, change will begin, because any shift in the conversation, whether it is from a "decision as metaphor" metaphor or from a "being sure as metaphor" trope, can lead to new and therapeutic patterns for both improvisationalists or weavers in conversation.

In another recent development, Fortugno (1991, 1991, July) has begun a project to test the meaning of RFA in a post-structuralist context in an attempt to examine possible re-forms of recursive frame analysis:

[Post-structuralist / (Recursive / Frame Analysis)]

This experimentation has led to Fortugno's (1991, 1991, July) variation called Permeable Frame Analysis which rejects some of the "structural" limitations of RFA and allows her greater flexibility in mapping the fluidity or permeable quality of frames or sayings. Her application of Derrida's (as discussed in Sarup, 1989, p. 36) concept of "a constant flickering" to the notion of frames helped to re-remind the recursive frame analyst of a metaphoric nature of frames and context building (i.e., the above-mentioned Burkean ebb and flow of the thisness of a that and the thatness of a this in the creation of meaning) (Burke, 1945/1969, p. 503), and to allow analysts a freedom to change and alter their RFA's through an on-going recursive and intuitive relationship with the text, and thus to avoid a sort of "frame paralysis" (Sharron, 1981) in their analysis and therapy.

Conclusion

As Keeney's cybernetic project enters its third decade, his applied ethnographies of communication have moved in directions of improvisation and weaving. Throughout this process, he has continued to change and refine his lens, to nurture new cybernetic ways of knowing and doing, and to draw creative and interesting distinctions in therapy and other human contexts. And, for clinical qualitative research, the future remains bright too, as long as people continue to scratch their curiosities concerning clinicians and their ways.

References

- Bandler, R., & Grinder, J. (1975). *The structure of magic: A book about language & therapy*. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books.
- Bandler, R., & Grinder, J. (1979). *Frogs into princes*. Moab, UT: Real People.
- Bateson, G. (1956). The message "This is play." In B. Schaffner (Ed.), *Group processes: Transactions of the second conference* (pp. 145-242). New York: Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation.
- Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an ecology of mind*. New York: Ballantine.
- Bateson, G. (1979). *Mind and nature: A necessary unity*. New York: Bantam.
- Becker, A. L. (1979). Text-building, epistemology, and aesthetics in Javanese shadow theatre. In A. L. Becker & A. A. Yengoyan (Eds.), *The imagination of reality: Essays in Southeast Asian coherence systems* (pp. 211-243). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Burke, K. (1969). *A grammar of motives*. Berkeley, CA: University of California. (Original work published 1945)
- Cecchin, G. (1987). Hypothesizing, circularity, and neutrality revisited: An invitation to curiosity. *Family Process*, 26, 405-413.

Chenail, R. (1991a). An introduction to recursive frame analysis. In M. J. McGee-Brown (Ed.), *Diversity and design: Studying culture and the individual* (pp. 374-381). Athens, GA: College of Education.

Chenail, R. J. (1991b). *Medical discourse and systemic frames of comprehension*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Chenail, R. (1992). Scientific, artistic, and clinical qualitative research. In N. Gibson, J. Preissle, & B. A. Schell (Eds.), *Subjectivity: Perceptions and biases: Proceedings from the fifth annual conference of the Qualitative Interest Group* [On-line]. Athens, GA: College of Education. Available: gopher moe.coe.uga.edu Directory: Quig92 Proceedings/ File:

Chenail, R. J., Douthit, P. E., Gale, J. E., Stormberg, J. L., Morris, G. H., Park, J. M., Sridaromont, S., & Schmer, V. (1990). "It's probably nothing serious, but...": Parents' interpretation of referral to pediatric cardiologists. *Health Communication*, 2(3), 165-187.

Chenail, R. J., Duffy, M., Fortugno, L., & Leeds, M. (1991). *Of text and textiles: Weaving in therapy*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Cronen, V. E., Johnson, K. M., & Lannamann, J. W. (1982). Paradoxes, double binds, and reflexive loops: An alternative theoretical perspective. *Family Process*, 21, 91-112.

Culler, J. (1989). Forward to the 1989 edition. In W. Empson, *The structure of complex words* (pp. v-xiii). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.

Davis, S. L. R., & Davis, D. (1982). NLP and marital and family therapy. *The Family Therapy Networker*, 6(3), 19-21, 46.

Empson, W. (1989). *The structure of complex words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University. (Original work published 1951)

Erikson, E. H. (1958). The nature of clinical evidence. *Dædalus*, 87, 65-87.

Eisner, E. O. (1981). On the differences between scientific and artistic approaches to qualitative research. *Educational Research*, 10(4), 5-9.

Fisch, R., Weakland, J., & Segal, L. (1982). *The Tactics of Change: Doing Therapy Briefly*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Fortugno, L. (1991). *Intersession break talk in supervision: A permeable frame analysis*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Nova University, Fort Lauderdale, FL.

Fortugno, L. (1991, July). *Recursive frame analysis*. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Society for Cybernetics, Amherst, MA.

- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.
- Grinder, J., & Bandler, R. (1976). *The structure of magic II: A book about communication & change*. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books.
- Grinder, J., & Bandler, R. (1981). *Trance-formation: Neuro-linguistic programming and the structure of hypnosis*. Moab, UT: Real People.
- Keeney, B. P. (1979). Ecosystemic epistemology: An alternative paradigm for diagnosis. *Family Process, 18*, 117-133.
- Keeney, B. P. (1982a). Not pragmatics, not aesthetics. *Family Process, 21*, 429-434.
- Keeney, B. P. (1982b). What is an epistemology of family therapy? *Family Process, 21*, 153-168.
- Keeney, B. P. (1983). *Aesthetics of change*. New York: Guilford.
- Keeney, B. P. (1987a). The construction of therapeutic realities. *Psychotherapy, 24*, 469-476.
- Keeney, B. P. (1987b). *Recursive frame analysis: A method for organizing therapeutic discourse*. Unpublished manuscript, Texas Tech University, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Lubbock, TX.
- Keeney, B. P. (1990). Cybernetics of dialogue: A conversational paradigm for systemic therapies. In Tullio Maranh o (Ed.), *The interpretation of dialogue* (pp. 242- 266). Chicago, University of Chicago.
- Keeney, B. P. (1991). *Improvisational therapy*. New York: Guilford.
- Keeney, B. P., & Bobele, M. (1989). A brief note on family violence. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy, 10*(2), 93-95.
- Keeney, B. P., & Morris, J. P. (1985). Family therapy practice and research: A dialogue. In L. L. Andreozzi (Ed.), *Integrating research and clinical practice* (pp. 98- 107). Rockville, MD: Aspen.
- Keeney, B. P., & Ross, J. M. (1985). *Mind in therapy: Constructing systemic family therapies*. New York: Basic Books.
- Keeney, B. P., & Silverstein, O. (1986). *The therapeutic voice of Olga Silverstein*. New York: Guilford.
- Keeney, B. P., & Sprenkle, D. H. (1982). Ecosystemic epistemology: Critical implications for the aesthetics and pragmatics of family therapy. *Family Process, 21*, 1-19.

- Keeney, B. P., & Thomas, F. N. (1986). Cybernetic foundations of family therapy. In F. P. Piercy & D. H. Sprenkle, & Associates (Eds.), *Family therapy sourcebook* (pp. 262-287). New York: Guilford.
- McCulloch, W. S. (1965). What is a number that a man may know it, and a man, that he may know a number? In W. S. McCulloch, *Embodiments of mind* (pp. 1- 18). Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology. (Original work published 1961)
- McNamee, S. (1988). Accepting research as social intervention: Implications of a systemic epistemology. *Communications Quarterly*, 36, 50-68.
- McNamee, S., Lannamann, J., & Tomm, K. (1983). Milan clinicians and CMM theoreticians meet: Was it a fertile connection? *Journal of Strategic and Systemic Therapies*, 2(1), 57-62.
- Miller, J. H. (1990). Narrative. In F. Lentricchia & T. McLaughlin (Eds.), *Critical terms for literary study* (pp. 66-79). Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Morris, W. (Ed.). (1970). *The American heritage dictionary of the English language*. New York: American Heritage Publishing.
- Muchnick, R. (1991). *Humor and therapy: It may be a laughing matter*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Nova University, Fort Lauderdale, FL.
- Pearce, W. B., & Cronen, V. E. (1980). *Communication, action, and meaning: The creation of social realities*. New York: Praeger.
- Percy, W. (1987). *The message in the bottle: How queer man is, how queer language is, and what one has to do with the other*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux. (Original work published 1954)
- Sarup, M. (1989). *An introductory guide to post-structuralism and postmodernism*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia.
- Selvini-Palazzoli, Boscolo, L., Cecchin, G., & Prata, G. (1980). Hypothesizing-- circularity-- neutrality: Three guidelines for the conductor of the session. *Family Process*, 19, 3-12.
- Sharron, A. (1981). Frame paralysis: When time stands still. *Social Research*, 48, 510-520.
- Smith, M. L. (1987). Publishing qualitative research. *American Educational Research Journal*, 24, 173-183.
- Spencer-Brown, G. (1973). *Laws of form*. New York: Bantam.
- Stewart, K., & Valentine, L. N. (1990). Recursiveness in qualitative research: The story about the story. *The Qualitative Report*, 1(1), 7-9.

Stewart, K., & Valentine, L. N. (1991). Metaphors in domestic violence. In B. P. Keeney, W. L. Madsen, & B. F. Nolan (Eds.), *The systemic therapist: Volume II* (pp. 60-77). St. Paul, MN: Systemic Therapy Press.

Tomm, K. (1987a). Interventive interviewing: Part I. strategizing as a fourth guideline for the therapist. *Family Process*, 26, 3-13.

Tomm, K. (1987b). Interventive interviewing: Part II. reflexive questioning as a means to enable self-healing. *Family Process*, 26, 167-183.

Tomm, K. (1988). Interventive interviewing: Part III. intending to ask lineal, circular, strategic, or reflexive questions? *Family Process*, 27, 1-15.

Tomm, K., & Lannamann, J. (1988). Questions as interventions. *The Family Therapy Networker*, 12(5), 38-41.

von Foerster, H. (1984). On constructing a reality. In P. Watzlawick (Ed.), *The invented reality: How do we know what we believe we know? (contributions to constructivism)* (pp. 41-61). New York: Norton.

Watzlawick, P., Beavin, J. B., & Jackson, D. D. (1967). *Pragmatics of human communication: A study of interactional patterns, pathologies, and paradoxes*. New York: Norton.

Watzlawick, P., & Weakland, J. (1977). *The interactional view: Studies at the mental health research institute Palo Alto, 1965-1974*. New York: Norton.

Watzlawick, P., Weakland, J., Fisch, R. (1974). *Change: Principles of problem formation and problem resolution*. New York: Norton.

Weakland, J., Fisch, R., Watzlawick, P., & Bodin, A. B. (1974). Brief therapy: Focused problem resolution. *Family Process*, 13, 141-168.

Ronald J. Chenail is the Dean of the School of Social and Systemic Studies at Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33314, USA. His e-mail address is ron@nsu.acast.nova.edu.
