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# INTRODUCTION

## *The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research*

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**W**riting about scientific research, including qualitative research, from the vantage point of the colonized, a position that she chooses to privilege, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) states that “the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism.” She continues, “The word itself is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary. . . . It is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism,” with the ways in which “knowledge about indigenous peoples was collected, classified, and then represented back to the West” (p. 1). This dirty word stirs up anger, silence, distrust. “It is so powerful that indigenous people even write poetry about research” (p. 1). It is one of colonialism’s most sordid legacies.

Sadly, qualitative research, in many if not all of its forms (observation, participation, interviewing, ethnography), serves as a metaphor for colonial knowledge, for power, and for truth. The metaphor works this way. Research, quantitative and qualitative, is scientific. Research provides the foundation for reports about and representations of “the Other.” In the colonial context, research becomes an objective way of representing the dark-skinned Other to the white world.

Colonizing nations relied on the human disciplines, especially sociology and anthropology, to produce knowledge about strange and foreign worlds. This close

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involvement with the colonial project contributed, in significant ways, to qualitative research's long and anguished history and to its becoming a dirty word (for reviews, see Foley & Valenzuela, Chapter 9, this volume; Tedlock, Volume 2, Chapter 5). In sociology, the work of the "Chicago school" in the 1920s and 1930s established the importance of qualitative inquiry for the study of human group life. In anthropology during the same period, the discipline-defining studies of Boas, Mead, Benedict, Bateson, Evans-Pritchard, Radcliffe-Brown, and Malinowski charted the outlines of the fieldwork method (see Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Stocking, 1986, 1989).

The agenda was clear-cut: The observer went to a foreign setting to study the culture, customs, and habits of another human group. Often this was a group that stood in the way of white settlers. Ethnographic reports of these groups were incorporated into colonizing strategies, ways of controlling the foreign, deviant, or troublesome Other. Soon qualitative research would be employed in other social and behavioral science disciplines, including education (especially the work of Dewey), history, political science, business, medicine, nursing, social work, and communications (for criticisms of this tradition, see Smith, 1999; Vidich & Lyman, 2000; see also Rosaldo, 1989, pp. 25–45; Tedlock, Volume 2, Chapter 5).

By the 1960s, battle lines were drawn within the quantitative and qualitative camps. Quantitative scholars relegated qualitative research to a subordinate status in the scientific arena. In response, qualitative researchers extolled the humanistic virtues of their subjective, interpretive approach to the study of human group life. In the meantime, indigenous peoples found themselves subjected to the indignities of both approaches, as each methodology was used in the name of colonizing powers (see Battiste, 2000; Semali & Kincheloe, 1999).

Vidich and Lyman (1994, 2000) have charted many key features of this painful history. In their now-classic analysis they note, with some irony, that qualitative research in sociology and anthropology was "born out of concern to understand the 'other'" (Vidich & Lyman, 2000, p. 38). Furthermore, this "other" was the exotic Other, a primitive, nonwhite person from a foreign culture judged to be less civilized than ours. Of course, there were colonialists long before there were anthropologists and ethnographers. Nonetheless, there would be no colonial, and now no neocolonial, history were it not for this investigative mentality that turned the dark-skinned Other into the object of the ethnographer's gaze. From the very beginning, qualitative research was implicated in a racist project.<sup>1</sup>

In this introductory chapter, we define the field of qualitative research, then navigate, chart, and review the history of qualitative research in the human disciplines. This will allow us to locate this volume and its contents within their historical moments. (These historical moments are somewhat artificial; they are socially constructed, quasi-historical, and overlapping conventions. Nevertheless, they permit a "performance" of developing ideas. They also facilitate an increasing sensitivity to and sophistication about the pitfalls and promises of ethnography and qualitative

research.) We also present a conceptual framework for reading the qualitative research act as a multicultural, gendered process and then provide a brief introduction to the chapters that follow. Returning to the observations of Vidich and Lyman as well as those of hooks, we conclude with a brief discussion of qualitative research and critical race theory (see also Ladson-Billings & Donnor, Chapter 11, this volume). We also discuss the threats to qualitative, human subject research from the methodological conservatism movement mentioned briefly in our preface. As we note in the preface, we use the metaphor of the bridge to structure what follows. This volume is intended to serve as a bridge connecting historical moments, politics, the decolonization project, research methods, paradigms, and communities of interpretive scholars.

## ■ DEFINITIONAL ISSUES

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Qualitative research is a field of inquiry in its own right. It crosscuts disciplines, fields, and subject matters.<sup>2</sup> A complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions surround the term *qualitative research*. These include the traditions associated with foundationalism, positivism, postfoundationalism, postpositivism, poststructuralism, and the many qualitative research perspectives, and/or methods connected to cultural and interpretive studies (the chapters in Part II, this volume, take up these paradigms).<sup>3</sup> There are separate and detailed literatures on the many methods and approaches that fall under the category of qualitative research, such as case study, politics and ethics, participatory inquiry, interviewing, participant observation, visual methods, and interpretive analysis.

In North America, qualitative research operates in a complex historical field that crosscuts at least eight historical moments. (We discuss these moments in detail below.) These moments overlap and simultaneously operate in the present.<sup>4</sup> We define them as the *traditional* (1900–1950); the *modernist*, or golden age (1950–1970); *blurred genres* (1970–1986); the *crisis of representation* (1986–1990); the *postmodern*, a period of experimental and new ethnographies (1990–1995); *postexperimental inquiry* (1995–2000); the *methodologically contested present* (2000–2004); and the *fractured future*, which is now (2005–). The future, the eighth moment, confronts the methodological backlash associated with the evidence-based social movement. It is concerned with moral discourse, with the development of sacred textualities. The eighth moment asks that the social sciences and the humanities become sites for critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalization, freedom, and community.<sup>5</sup>

The postmodern and postexperimental moments were defined in part by a concern for literary and rhetorical tropes and the narrative turn, a concern for storytelling, for composing ethnographies in new ways (Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Ellis, 2004; Goodall, 2000; Pelias, 2004; Richardson & Lockridge, 2004; Trujillo, 2004). Laurel

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Richardson (1997) observes that this moment was shaped by a new sensibility, by doubt, by a refusal to privilege any method or theory (p. 173). But now at the dawn of this new century we struggle to connect qualitative research to the hopes, needs, goals, and promises of a free democratic society.

Successive waves of epistemological theorizing move across these eight moments. The traditional period is associated with the positivist, foundational paradigm. The modernist or golden age and blurred genres moments are connected to the appearance of postpositivist arguments. At the same time, a variety of new interpretive, qualitative perspectives were taken up, including hermeneutics, structuralism, semiotics, phenomenology, cultural studies, and feminism.<sup>6</sup> In the blurred genres phase, the humanities became central resources for critical, interpretive theory, and the qualitative research project broadly conceived. The researcher became a *bricoleur* (see below), learning how to borrow from many different disciplines.

The blurred genres phase produced the next stage, the crisis of representation. Here researchers struggled with how to locate themselves and their subjects in reflexive texts. A kind of methodological diaspora took place, a two-way exodus. Humanists migrated to the social sciences, searching for new social theory, new ways to study popular culture and its local, ethnographic contexts. Social scientists turned to the humanities, hoping to learn how to do complex structural and poststructural readings of social texts. From the humanities, social scientists also learned how to produce texts that refused to be read in simplistic, linear, incontrovertible terms. The line between text and context blurred. In the postmodern, experimental moment, researchers continued to move away from foundational and quasi-foundational criteria (see Smith & Hodkinson, Volume 3, Chapter 13; Richardson & St. Pierre, Volume 3, Chapter 15). Alternative evaluative criteria were sought, criteria that might prove evocative, moral, critical, and rooted in local understandings.

Any definition of qualitative research must work within this complex historical field. *Qualitative research* means different things in each of these moments. Nonetheless, an initial, generic definition can be offered: Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.<sup>7</sup>

Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interview; artifacts; cultural texts and productions; observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected

interpretive practices, hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand. It is understood, however, that each practice makes the world visible in a different way. Hence there is frequently a commitment to using more than one interpretive practice in any study.

### The Qualitative Researcher as *Bricoleur* and Quilt Maker

The qualitative researcher may be described using multiple and gendered images: scientist, naturalist, field-worker, journalist, social critic, artist, performer, jazz musician, filmmaker, quilt maker, essayist. The many methodological practices of qualitative research may be viewed as soft science, journalism, ethnography, bricolage, quilt making, or montage. The researcher, in turn, may be seen as a *bricoleur*, as a maker of quilts, or, as in filmmaking, a person who assembles images into montages. (On montage, see Cook, 1981, pp. 171–177; Monaco, 1981, pp. 322–328; and the discussion below. On quilting, see hooks, 1990, pp. 115–122; Wolcott, 1995, pp. 31–33.)

Harper (1987, pp. 9, 74–75, 92), de Certeau (1984, p. xv), Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg (1992, p. 2), Lévi-Strauss (1966, p. 17), Weinstein and Weinstein (1991, p. 161), and Kincheloe (2001) clarify the meanings of *bricolage* and *bricoleur*.<sup>8</sup> A *bricoleur* makes do by “adapting the *bricoles* of the world. *Bricolage* is ‘the poetic making do’” (de Certeau, 1984, p. xv) with “such bricoles—the odds and ends, the bits left over” (Harper, 1987, p. 74). The *bricoleur* is a “Jack of all trades, a kind of professional do-it-yourself” (Lévi-Strauss, 1966, p. 17). In their work, *bricoleurs* define and extend themselves (Harper, 1987, p. 75). Indeed, the *bricoleur*’s life story, or biography, “may be thought of as bricolage” (Harper, 1987, p. 92).

There are many kinds of *bricoleurs*—interpretive, narrative, theoretical, political, methodological (see below). The interpretive *bricoleur* produces a bricolage—that is, a pieced-together set of representations that is fitted to the specifics of a complex situation. “The solution (bricolage) which is the result of the *bricoleur*’s method is an [emergent] construction” (Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991, p. 161) that changes and takes new forms as the *bricoleur* adds different tools, methods, and techniques of representation and interpretation to the puzzle. Nelson et al. (1992) describe the methodology of cultural studies as “a bricolage. Its choice of practice, that is, is pragmatic, strategic and self-reflexive” (p. 2). This understanding can be applied, with qualifications, to qualitative research.

The qualitative researcher as *bricoleur*, or maker of quilts, uses the aesthetic and material tools of his or her craft, deploying whatever strategies, methods, and empirical materials are at hand (Becker, 1998, p. 2). If the researcher needs to invent, or piece together, new tools or techniques, he or she will do so. Choices regarding which interpretive practices to employ are not necessarily made in advance. As Nelson et al. (1992) note, the “choice of research practices depends upon the questions that are asked, and the questions depend on their context” (p. 2), what is available in the context, and what the researcher can do in that setting.

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These interpretive practices involve aesthetic issues, an aesthetics of representation that goes beyond the pragmatic or the practical. Here the concept of *montage* is useful (see Cook, 1981, p. 323; Monaco, 1981, pp. 171–172). Montage is a method of editing cinematic images. In the history of cinematography, montage is most closely associated with the work of Sergei Eisenstein, especially his film *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925). In montage, several different images are juxtaposed to or superimposed on one another to create a picture. In a sense, montage is like *pentimento*, in which something that has been painted out of a picture (an image the painter “repented,” or denied) becomes visible again, creating something new. What is new is what had been obscured by a previous image.

Montage and *pentimento*, like jazz, which is improvisation, create the sense that images, sounds, and understandings are blending together, overlapping, forming a composite, a new creation. The images seem to shape and define one another, and an emotional, gestalt effect is produced. In film montage, images are often combined in a swiftly run sequence that produces a dizzily revolving collection of several images around a central or focused picture or sequence; directors often use such effects to signify the passage of time.

Perhaps the most famous instance of montage in film is the Odessa Steps sequence in *The Battleship Potemkin*. In the climax of the film, the citizens of Odessa are being massacred by czarist troops on the stone steps leading down to the harbor. Eisenstein cuts to a young mother as she pushes her baby in a carriage across the landing in front of the firing troops.<sup>9</sup> Citizens rush past her, jolting the carriage, which she is afraid to push down to the next flight of stairs. The troops are above her, firing at the citizens. She is trapped between the troops and the steps. She screams. A line of rifles points to the sky, the rifle barrels erupting in smoke. The mother’s head sways back. The wheels of the carriage teeter on the edge of the steps. The mother’s hand clutches the silver buckle of her belt. Below her, people are being beaten by soldiers. Blood drips over the mother’s white gloves. The baby’s hand reaches out of the carriage. The mother sways back and forth. The troops advance. The mother falls back against the carriage. A woman watches in horror as the rear wheels of the carriage roll off the edge of the landing. With accelerating speed, the carriage bounces down the steps, past dead citizens. The baby is jostled from side to side inside the carriage. The soldiers fire their rifles into a group of wounded citizens. A student screams as the carriage leaps across the steps, tilts, and overturns (Cook, 1981, p. 167).<sup>10</sup>

Montage uses brief images to create a clearly defined sense of urgency and complexity. It invites viewers to construct interpretations that build on one another as a scene unfolds. These interpretations are based on associations among the contrasting images that blend into one another. The underlying assumption of montage is that viewers perceive and interpret the shots in a “montage sequence not *sequentially*, or one at a time, but rather *simultaneously*” (Cook, 1981, p. 172). The viewer puts the sequences together into a meaningful emotional whole, as if at a glance, all at once.

The qualitative researcher who uses montage is like a quilt maker or a jazz improviser. The quilter stitches, edits, and puts slices of reality together. This process creates and brings psychological and emotional unity—a pattern—to an interpretive experience. There are many examples of montage in current qualitative research (see Diversi, 1998; Holman Jones, 1999; Lather & Smithies, 1997; Ronai, 1998; see also Holman Jones, Volume 3, Chapter 7). Using multiple voices, different textual formats, and various typefaces, Lather and Smithies (1997) weave a complex text about AIDS and women who are HIV-positive. Holman Jones (1999) creates a performance text using lyrics from the blues songs sung by Billie Holiday.

In texts based on the metaphors of montage, quilt making, and jazz improvisation, many different things are going on at the same time—different voices, different perspectives, points of views, angles of vision. Like autoethnographic performance texts, works that use montage simultaneously create and enact moral meaning. They move from the personal to the political, from the local to the historical and the cultural. These are dialogical texts. They presume an active audience. They create spaces for give-and-take between reader and writer. They do more than turn the Other into the object of the social science gaze (see Alexander, Volume 2, Chapter 3; Holman Jones, Volume 3, Chapter 7).

Qualitative research is inherently multimethod in focus (Flick, 2002, pp. 226–227). However, the use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. Objective reality can never be captured. We know a thing only through its representations. Triangulation is not a tool or a strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation (Flick, 2002, p. 227). The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry (see Flick, 2002, p. 229).

In Chapter 15 of Volume 3, Richardson and St. Pierre dispute the usefulness of the concept of triangulation, asserting that the central image for qualitative inquiry should be the crystal, not the triangle. Mixed-genre texts in the postexperimental moment have more than three sides. Like crystals, Eisenstein's montage, the jazz solo, or the pieces in a quilt, the mixed-genre text “combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations. . . . Crystals grow, change, alter. . . . Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions” (Richardson, 2000, p. 934).

In the crystallization process, the writer tells the same tale from different points of view. For example, in *A Thrice-Told Tale* (1992), Margery Wolf uses fiction, field notes, and a scientific article to give three different accounts of the same set of experiences in a native village. Similarly, in her play *Fires in the Mirror* (1993), Anna Deavere Smith presents a series of performance pieces based on interviews with people who were involved in a racial conflict in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, on August 19, 1991. The play

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has multiple speaking parts, including conversations with gang members, police officers, and anonymous young girls and boys. There is no one “correct” telling of this event. Each telling, like light hitting a crystal, reflects a different perspective on this incident.

Viewed as a crystalline form, as a montage, or as a creative performance around a central theme, triangulation as a form of, or alternative to, validity thus can be extended. Triangulation is the simultaneous display of multiple, refracted realities. Each of the metaphors “works” to create simultaneity rather than the sequential or linear. Readers and audiences are then invited to explore competing visions of the context, to become immersed in and merge with new realities to comprehend.

The methodological *bricoleur* is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks, ranging from interviewing to intensive self-reflection and introspection. The theoretical *bricoleur* reads widely and is knowledgeable about the many interpretive paradigms (feminism, Marxism, cultural studies, constructivism, queer theory) that can be brought to any particular problem. He or she may not, however, feel that paradigms can be mingled or synthesized. That is, one cannot easily move between paradigms as overarching philosophical systems denoting particular ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies. They represent belief systems that attach users to particular worldviews. Perspectives, in contrast, are less well-developed systems, and one can move between them more easily. The researcher as *bricoleur*-theorist works between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms.

The interpretive *bricoleur* understands that research is an interactive process shaped by his or her own personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and by those of the people in the setting. The critical *bricoleur* stresses the dialectical and hermeneutic nature of interdisciplinary inquiry, knowing that the boundaries that previously separated traditional disciplines no longer hold (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 683). The political *bricoleur* knows that science is power, for all research findings have political implications. There is no value-free science. This researcher seeks a civic social science based on a politics of hope (Lincoln, 1999). The gendered, narrative *bricoleur* also knows that researchers all tell stories about the worlds they have studied. Thus the narratives, or stories, scientists tell are accounts couched and framed within specific storytelling traditions, often defined as paradigms (e.g., positivism, postpositivism, constructivism).

The product of the interpretive *bricoleur*'s labor is a complex, quiltlike bricolage, a reflexive collage or montage—a set of fluid, interconnected images and representations. This interpretive structure is like a quilt, a performance text, a sequence of representations connecting the parts to the whole.

### *Qualitative Research as a Site of Multiple Interpretive Practices*

Qualitative research, as a set of interpretive activities, privileges no single methodological practice over another. As a site of discussion, or discourse, qualitative research is difficult to define clearly. It has no theory or paradigm that is distinctly its own. As the

contributions to Part II of this volume reveal, multiple theoretical paradigms claim use of qualitative research methods and strategies, from constructivist to cultural studies, feminism, Marxism, and ethnic models of study. Qualitative research is used in many separate disciplines, as we will discuss below. It does not belong to a single discipline.

Nor does qualitative research have a distinct set of methods or practices that are entirely its own. Qualitative researchers use semiotics, narrative, content, discourse, archival and phonemic analysis, even statistics, tables, graphs, and numbers. They also draw on and utilize the approaches, methods, and techniques of ethnomethodology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, feminism, rhizomatics, deconstructionism, ethnography, interviewing, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, survey research, and participant observation, among others.<sup>11</sup> All of these research practices “can provide important insights and knowledge” (Nelson et al., 1992, p. 2). No specific method or practice can be privileged over any other.

Many of these methods, or research practices, are used in other contexts in the human disciplines. Each bears the traces of its own disciplinary history. Thus there is an extensive history of the uses and meanings of ethnography and ethnology in education (see in this volume Ladson-Billings & Donnor, Chapter 11; Kincheloe & McLaren, Chapter 12); of participant observation and ethnography in anthropology (see Foley & Valenzuela, Chapter 9, this volume; Tedlock, Volume 2, Chapter 5; Brady, Volume 3, Chapter 16), sociology (see Holstein & Gubrium, Volume 2, Chapter 6; Fontana & Frey, Volume 3, Chapter 4; Harper, Volume 3, Chapter 6), communications (see Alexander, Volume 2, Chapter 3; Holman Jones, Volume 3, Chapter 7), and cultural studies (see Saukko, Volume 3, Chapter 13); of textual, hermeneutic, feminist, psychoanalytic, arts-based, semiotic, and narrative analysis in cinema and literary studies (see Olesen, Chapter 10, this volume 1; Finley, Volume 3, Chapter 3; Brady, Volume 3, Chapter 16); and of narrative, discourse, and conversational analysis in sociology, medicine, communications, and education (see Miller & Crabtree, Volume 2, Chapter 11; Chase, Volume 3, Chapter 2; Peräkylä, Volume 3, Chapter 11).

The many histories that surround each method or research strategy reveal how multiple uses and meanings are brought to each practice. Textual analyses in literary studies, for example, often treat texts as self-contained systems. On the other hand, a researcher working from a cultural studies or feminist perspective reads a text in terms of its location within a historical moment marked by a particular gender, race, or class ideology. A cultural studies use of ethnography would bring a set of understandings from feminism, postmodernism, and poststructuralism to the project. These understandings would not be shared by mainstream postpositivist sociologists. Similarly, postpositivist and poststructural historians bring different understandings and uses to the methods and findings of historical research (see Tierney, 2000). These tensions and contradictions are all evident in the chapters in this volume.

These separate and multiple uses and meanings of the methods of qualitative research make it difficult for scholars to agree on any essential definition of the field, for it is never just one thing.<sup>12</sup> Still, we must establish a definition for purposes of this

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discussion. We borrow from, and paraphrase, Nelson et al.'s (1992, p. 4) attempt to define cultural studies:

Qualitative research is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counterdisciplinary field. It crosscuts the humanities and the social and physical sciences. Qualitative research is many things at the same time. It is multiparadigmatic in focus. Its practitioners are sensitive to the value of the multimethod approach. They are committed to the naturalistic perspective and to the interpretive understanding of human experience. At the same time, the field is inherently political and shaped by multiple ethical and political positions.

Qualitative research embraces two tensions at the same time. On the one hand, it is drawn to a broad, interpretive, postexperimental, postmodern, feminist, and critical sensibility. On the other hand, it is drawn to more narrowly defined positivist, postpositivist, humanistic, and naturalistic conceptions of human experience and its analysis. Further, these tensions can be combined in the same project, bringing both postmodern and naturalistic, or both critical and humanistic, perspectives to bear.

This rather awkward statement means that qualitative research, as a set of practices, embraces within its own multiple disciplinary histories constant tensions and contradictions over the project itself, including its methods and the forms its findings and interpretations take. The field sprawls between and cuts across all of the human disciplines, even including, in some cases, the physical sciences. Its practitioners are variously committed to modern, postmodern, and postexperimental sensibilities and the approaches to social research that these sensibilities imply.

### Resistances to Qualitative Studies

The academic and disciplinary resistances to qualitative research illustrate the politics embedded in this field of discourse. The challenges to qualitative research are many. As Seale, Gobo, Gubrium, and Silverman (2004) observe, we can best understand these criticisms by “distinguish[ing] analytically the political (or external) role of [qualitative] methodology from the procedural (or internal) one” (p. 7). Politics situate methodology within and outside the academy. Procedural issues define how qualitative methodology is used to produce knowledge about the world.

Often, the political and the procedural intersect. Politicians and “hard” scientists sometimes call qualitative researchers journalists or soft scientists. The work of qualitative scholars is termed unscientific, or only exploratory, or subjective. It is called criticism rather than theory or science, or it is interpreted politically, as a disguised version of Marxism or secular humanism (see Huber, 1995; see also Denzin, 1997, pp. 258–261).

These political and procedural resistances reflect an uneasy awareness that the interpretive traditions of qualitative research commit the researcher to a critique of the positivist or postpositivist project. But the positivist resistance to qualitative research goes beyond the “ever-present desire to maintain a distinction between hard science and soft scholarship” (Carey, 1989, p. 99; see also Smith & Hodkinson,

Volume 3, Chapter 13). The experimental (positivist) sciences (physics, chemistry, economics, and psychology, for example) are often seen as the crowning achievements of Western civilization, and in their practices it is assumed that “truth” can transcend opinion and personal bias (Carey, 1989, p. 99; Schwandt, 1997b, p. 309). Qualitative research is seen as an assault on this tradition, whose adherents often retreat into a “value-free objectivist science” (Carey, 1989, p. 104) model to defend their position. They seldom attempt to make explicit, or to critique, the “moral and political commitments in their own contingent work” (Carey, 1989, p. 104; see also Guba & Lincoln, Chapter 8, this volume).

Positivists further allege that the so-called new experimental qualitative researchers write fiction, not science, and that these researchers have no way of verifying their truth statements. Ethnographic poetry and fiction signal the death of empirical science, and there is little to be gained by attempting to engage in moral criticism. These critics presume a stable, unchanging reality that can be studied using the empirical methods of objective social science (see Huber, 1995). The province of qualitative research, accordingly, is the world of lived experience, for this is where individual belief and action intersect with culture. Under this model there is no preoccupation with discourse and method as material interpretive practices that constitute representation and description. Thus is the textual, narrative turn rejected by the positivists.

The opposition to positive science by the poststructuralists is seen, then, as an attack on reason and truth. At the same time, the positivist science attack on qualitative research is regarded as an attempt to legislate one version of truth over another.

### *Politics and Reemergent Scientism*

The scientifically based research (SBR) movement initiated in recent years by the National Research Council (NRC) has created a hostile political environment for qualitative research. Connected to the federal legislation known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, SBR embodies a reemergent scientism (Maxwell, 2004), a positivist, evidence-based epistemology. The movement encourages researchers to employ “rigorous, systematic, and objective methodology to obtain reliable and valid knowledge” (Ryan & Hood, 2004, p. 80). The preferred methodology employs well-defined causal models and independent and dependent variables. Researchers examine causal models in the context of randomized controlled experiments, which allow for replication and generalization of their results (Ryan & Hood, 2004, p. 81).

Under such a framework, qualitative research becomes suspect. Qualitative research does not require well-defined variables or causal models. The observations and measurements of qualitative scholars are not based on subjects’ random assignment to experimental groups. Qualitative researchers do not generate “hard evidence” using such methods. At best, through case study, interview, and ethnographic methods, researchers can gather descriptive materials that can be tested with experimental methods. The epistemologies of critical race, queer, postcolonial, feminist, and postmodern theories are

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rendered useless by the SBR perspective, relegated at best to the category of scholarship, not science (Ryan & Hood, 2004, p. 81; St. Pierre, 2004, p. 132).

Critics of the SBR movement are united on the following points. “Bush science” (Lather, 2004, p. 19) and its experimental, evidence-based methodologies represent a racialized, masculinist backlash to the proliferation of qualitative inquiry methods over the past two decades. The movement endorses a narrow view of science (Maxwell, 2004) that celebrates a “neoclassical experimentalism that is a throwback to the Campbell-Stanley era and its dogmatic adherence to an exclusive reliance on quantitative methods” (Howe, 2004, p. 42). The movement represents “nostalgia for a simple and ordered universe of science that never was” (Popkewitz, 2004, p. 62). With its emphasis on only one form of scientific rigor, the NRC ignores the value of using complex historical, contextual, and political criteria to evaluate inquiry (Bloch, 2004).

As Howe (2004) observes, neoclassical experimentalists extol evidence-based “medical research as the model for educational research, particularly the random clinical trial” (p. 48). But dispensing a pill in a random clinical trial is quite unlike “dispensing a curriculum,” and the “effects” of an educational experiment cannot be easily measured, unlike a “10-point reduction in diastolic blood pressure” (p. 48; see also Miller & Crabtree, Volume 2, Chapter 11).

Qualitative researchers must learn to think outside the box as they critique the NRC and its methodological guidelines (Atkinson, 2004). They must apply their imaginations and find new ways to define such terms as *randomized design*, *causal model*, *policy studies*, and *public science* (Cannella & Lincoln, 2004a, 2004b; Lincoln & Cannella, 2004a, 2004b; Lincoln & Tierney, 2004; Weinstein, 2004). More deeply, qualitative researchers must resist conservative attempts to discredit qualitative inquiry by placing it back inside the box of positivism.

### *Mixed-Methods Experimentalism*

As Howe (2004) notes, the SBR movement finds a place for qualitative methods in mixed-methods experimental designs. In such designs, qualitative methods may be “employed either singly or in combination with quantitative methods, including the use of randomized experimental designs” (p. 49). Mixed-methods designs are direct descendants of classical experimentalism. They presume a methodological hierarchy in which quantitative methods are at the top and qualitative methods are relegated to “a largely auxiliary role in pursuit of the *technocratic* aim of accumulating knowledge of ‘what works’” (pp. 53–54).

The mixed-methods movement takes qualitative methods out of their natural home, which is within the critical, interpretive framework (Howe, 2004, p. 54; but see Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003, p. 15). It divides inquiry into dichotomous categories: exploration versus confirmation. Qualitative work is assigned to the first category, quantitative research to the second (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003, p. 15). Like the classic experimental model, it excludes stakeholders from dialogue and active participation in

the research process. This weakens its democratic and dialogical dimensions and decreases the likelihood that previously silenced voices will be heard (Howe, 2004, pp. 56–57). As Howe (2004) cautions, it is not just the “methodological fundamentalists’ who have bought into [this] approach. A sizable number of rather influential . . . educational researchers . . . have also signed on. This might be a compromise to the current political climate; it might be a backlash against the perceived excesses of postmodernism; it might be both. It is an ominous development, whatever the explanation” (p. 57).

### *Pragmatic Criticisms of Antifoundationalism*

Seale et al. (2004) contest what they regard as the excesses of an antimethodological, “anything goes,” romantic postmodernism that is associated with our project. They assert that too often the approach we value produces “low quality qualitative research and research results that are quite stereotypical and close to common sense” (p. 2). In contrast, they propose a practice-based, pragmatic approach that places research practice at the center. They note that research involves an engagement “with a variety of things and people: research materials . . . social theories, philosophical debates, values, methods, tests . . . research participants” (p. 2). (Actually, this approach is quite close to our own, especially our view of the *bricoleur* and bricolage.) Seale et al.’s situated methodology rejects the antifoundational claim that there are only partial truths, that the dividing line between fact and fiction has broken down (p. 3). These scholars believe that this dividing line has not collapsed, and that qualitative researchers should not accept stories if they do not accord with the best available facts (p. 6).

Oddly, these pragmatic procedural arguments reproduce a variant of the evidence-based model and its criticisms of poststructural, performative sensibilities. They can be used to provide political support for the methodological marginalization of the positions advanced by many of the contributors to this volume.



The complex political terrain described above defines the many traditions and strands of qualitative research: the British tradition and its presence in other national contexts; the American pragmatic, naturalistic, and interpretive traditions in sociology, anthropology, communications, and education; the German and French phenomenological, hermeneutic, semiotic, Marxist, structural, and poststructural perspectives; feminist studies, African American studies, Latino studies, queer studies, studies of indigenous and aboriginal cultures. The politics of qualitative research creates a tension that informs each of these traditions. This tension itself is constantly being reexamined and interrogated as qualitative research confronts a changing historical world, new intellectual positions, and its own institutional and academic conditions.

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To summarize: Qualitative research is many things to many people. Its essence is twofold: a commitment to some version of the naturalistic, interpretive approach to its subject matter and an ongoing critique of the politics and methods of postpositivism. We turn now to a brief discussion of the major differences between qualitative and quantitative approaches to research. We then discuss ongoing differences and tensions within qualitative inquiry.

## ■ QUALITATIVE VERSUS QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

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The word *qualitative* implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress *how* social experience is created and given meaning. In contrast, quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes. Proponents of such studies claim that their work is done from within a value-free framework.

### Research Styles: Doing the Same Things Differently?

Of course, both qualitative and quantitative researchers “think they know something about society worth telling to others, and they use a variety of forms, media and means to communicate their ideas and findings” (Becker, 1986, p. 122). Qualitative research differs from quantitative research in five significant ways (Becker, 1996). These points of difference, discussed in turn below, all involve different ways of addressing the same set of issues. They return always to the politics of research and to who has the power to legislate correct solutions to social problems.

*Uses of positivism and postpositivism.* First, both perspectives are shaped by the positivist and postpositivist traditions in the physical and social sciences (see the discussion below). These two positivist science traditions hold to naïve and critical realist positions concerning reality and its perception. In the positivist version it is contended that there is a reality out there to be studied, captured, and understood, whereas the postpositivists argue that reality can never be fully apprehended, only approximated (Guba, 1990, p. 22). Postpositivism relies on multiple methods as a way of capturing as much of reality as possible. At the same time, it emphasizes the discovery and verification of theories. Traditional evaluation criteria, such as internal and external validity, are stressed, as is the use of qualitative procedures that lend themselves to structured (sometimes statistical) analysis. Computer-assisted

methods of analysis that permit frequency counts, tabulations, and low-level statistical analyses may also be employed.

The positivist and postpositivist traditions linger like long shadows over the qualitative research project. Historically, qualitative research was defined within the positivist paradigm, where qualitative researchers attempted to do good positivist research with less rigorous methods and procedures. Some mid-20th-century qualitative researchers reported participant observation findings in terms of quasi-statistics (e.g., Becker, Geer, Hughes, & Strauss, 1961). As recently as 1998, Strauss and Corbin, two leading proponents of the grounded theory approach to qualitative research, attempted to modify the usual canons of good (positivist) science to fit their own postpositivist conception of rigorous research (but see Charmaz, Volume 2, Chapter 7; see also Glaser, 1992). Some applied researchers, while claiming to be atheoretical, often fit within the positivist or postpositivist framework by default.

Flick (2002) usefully summarizes the differences between these two approaches to inquiry, noting that the quantitative approach has been used for purposes of isolating “causes and effects . . . operationalizing theoretical relations . . . [and] measuring and . . . quantifying phenomena . . . allowing the generalization of findings” (p. 3). But today doubt is cast on such projects: “Rapid social change and the resulting diversification of life worlds are increasingly confronting social researchers with new social contexts and perspectives. . . traditional deductive methodologies . . . are failing. . . thus research is increasingly forced to make use of inductive strategies instead of starting from theories and testing them. . . knowledge and practice are studied as *local* knowledge and practice” (p. 2).

Spindler and Spindler (1992) summarize their qualitative approach to quantitative materials: “Instrumentation and quantification are simply procedures employed to extend and reinforce certain kinds of data, interpretations and test hypotheses across samples. Both must be kept in their place. One must avoid their premature or overly extensive use as a security mechanism” (p. 69).

Although many qualitative researchers in the postpositivist tradition use statistical measures, methods, and documents as a way of locating a group of subjects within a larger population, they seldom report their findings in terms of the kinds of complex statistical measures or methods to which quantitative researchers are drawn (e.g., path, regression, and log-linear analyses).

*Acceptance of postmodern sensibilities.* The use of quantitative, positivist methods and assumptions has been rejected by a new generation of qualitative researchers who are attached to poststructural and/or postmodern sensibilities. These researchers argue that positivist methods are but one way of telling stories about societies or social worlds. These methods may be no better or no worse than any other methods; they just tell different kinds of stories.

This tolerant view is not shared by all qualitative researchers (Huber, 1995). Many members of the critical theory, constructivist, poststructural, and postmodern

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schools of thought reject positivist and postpositivist criteria when evaluating their own work. They see these criteria as irrelevant to their work and contend that such criteria reproduce only a certain kind of science, a science that silences too many voices. These researchers seek alternative methods for evaluating their work, including verisimilitude, emotionality, personal responsibility, an ethic of caring, political praxis, multivoiced texts, and dialogues with subjects. In response, positivists and postpositivists argue that what they do is good science, free of individual bias and subjectivity. As noted above, they see postmodernism and poststructuralism as attacks on reason and truth.

*Capturing the individual's point of view.* Both qualitative and quantitative researchers are concerned with the individual's point of view. However, qualitative investigators think they can get closer to the actor's perspective through detailed interviewing and observation. They argue that quantitative researchers are seldom able to capture their subjects' perspectives because they have to rely on more remote, inferential empirical methods and materials. Many quantitative researchers regard the empirical materials produced by interpretive methods as unreliable, impressionistic, and not objective.

*Examining the constraints of everyday life.* Qualitative researchers are more likely to confront and come up against the constraints of the everyday social world. They see this world in action and embed their findings in it. Quantitative researchers abstract from this world and seldom study it directly. They seek a nomothetic or etic science based on probabilities derived from the study of large numbers of randomly selected cases. These kinds of statements stand above and outside the constraints of everyday life. Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, are committed to an emic, idiographic, case-based position that directs attention to the specifics of particular cases.

*Securing rich descriptions.* Qualitative researchers believe that rich descriptions of the social world are valuable, whereas quantitative researchers, with their etic, nomothetic commitments, are less concerned with such detail. Quantitative researchers are deliberately unconcerned with rich descriptions because such detail interrupts the process of developing generalizations.



The five points of difference described above reflect qualitative and quantitative scholars' commitments to different styles of research, different epistemologies, and different forms of representation. Each work tradition is governed by a different set of genres; each has its own classics, its own preferred forms of representation, interpretation, trustworthiness, and textual evaluation (see Becker, 1986, pp. 134–135). Qualitative researchers use ethnographic prose, historical narratives, first-person accounts, still photographs, life histories, fictionalized “facts,” and biographical and

autobiographical materials, among others. Quantitative researchers use mathematical models, statistical tables, and graphs, and they usually write about their research in impersonal, third-person prose.

## ■ TENSIONS WITHIN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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It is erroneous to presume that all qualitative researchers share the same assumptions about the five points of difference described above. As the following discussion reveals, positivist, postpositivist, and poststructural differences define and shape the discourses of qualitative research. Realists and postpositivists within the interpretive, qualitative research tradition criticize poststructuralists for taking the textual, narrative turn. These critics contend that such work is navel gazing. It produces the conditions “for a dialogue of the deaf between itself and the community” (Silverman, 1997, p. 240). Critics accuse those who attempt to capture the point of view of the interacting subject in the world of naïve humanism, of reproducing “a Romantic impulse which elevates the experiential to the level of the authentic” (Silverman, 1997, p. 248).

Still others assert that those who take the textual, performance turn ignore lived experience. Snow and Morrill (1995) argue that “this performance turn, like the preoccupation with discourse and storytelling, will take us further from the field of social action and the real dramas of everyday life and thus signal the death knell of ethnography as an empirically grounded enterprise” (p. 361). Of course, we disagree.

### Critical Realism

For some, there is a third stream, between naïve positivism and poststructuralism. Critical realism is an antipositivist movement in the social sciences closely associated with the works of Roy Bhaskar and Rom Harré (Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen, & Karlsson, 2002). Critical realists use the word *critical* in a particular way. This is not “Frankfurt school” critical theory, although there are traces of social criticism here and there (see Danermark et al., 2002, p. 201). Instead, *critical* in this context refers to a transcendental realism that rejects methodological individualism and universal claims to truth. Critical realists oppose logical positivist, relativist, and antifoundational epistemologies. Critical realists agree with the positivists that there is a world of events out there that is observable and independent of human consciousness. They hold that knowledge about this world is socially constructed. Society is made up of feeling, thinking human beings, and their interpretations of the world must be studied (Danermark et al., 2002, p. 200). Critical realists reject a correspondence theory of truth. They believe that reality is arranged in levels and that scientific work must go beyond statements of regularity to analysis of the mechanisms, processes, and structures that account for the patterns that are observed.

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Still, as postempiricist, antifoundational, critical theorists, we reject much of what the critical realists advocate. Throughout the past century, social science and philosophy have been continually tangled up with one another. Various “isms” and philosophical movements have crisscrossed sociological and educational discourses, from positivism to postpositivism, to analytic and linguistic philosophy, to hermeneutics, structuralism, poststructuralism, Marxism, feminism, and current post-post versions of all of the above. Some have said that the logical positivists steered the social sciences on a rigorous course of self-destruction.

We do not think that critical realism will keep the social science ship afloat. The social sciences are normative disciplines, always already embedded in issues of value, ideology, power, desire, sexism, racism, domination, repression, and control. We want a social science that is committed up front to issues of social justice, equity, nonviolence, peace, and universal human rights. We do not want a social science that says it can address these issues if it wants to. For us, that is no longer an option.

With these differences within and between interpretive traditions in hand, we must now briefly discuss the history of qualitative research. We break this history into eight historical moments, mindful that any history is always somewhat arbitrary and always at least partially a social construction.

## ■ THE HISTORY OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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The history of qualitative research reveals that the modern social science disciplines have taken as their mission “the analysis and understanding of the patterned conduct and social processes of society” (Vidich & Lyman, 2000, p. 37). The notion that social scientists could carry out this task presupposed that they had the ability to observe this world objectively. Qualitative methods were a major tool of such observations.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout the history of qualitative research, qualitative investigators have defined their work in terms of hopes and values, “religious faiths, occupational and professional ideologies” (Vidich & Lyman, 2000, p. 39). Qualitative research (like all research) has always been judged on the “standard of whether the work communicates or ‘says’ something to us” (Vidich & Lyman, 2000, p. 39), based on how we conceptualize our reality and our images of the world. *Epistemology* is the word that has historically defined these standards of evaluation. In the contemporary period, as we have argued above, many received discourses on epistemology are now being reevaluated.

Vidich and Lyman’s (2000) work on the history of qualitative research covers the following (somewhat) overlapping stages: early ethnography (to the 17th century), colonial ethnography (17th-, 18th-, and 19th-century explorers), the ethnography of the American Indian as “Other” (late-19th- and early 20th-century anthropology), community studies and ethnographies of American immigrants (early 20th century through the 1960s), studies of ethnicity and assimilation (midcentury through the 1980s), and the present, which we call the *eighth moment*.

In each of these eras, researchers were and have been influenced by their political hopes and ideologies, discovering findings in their research that confirmed their prior theories or beliefs. Early ethnographers confirmed the racial and cultural diversity of peoples throughout the globe and attempted to fit this diversity into a theory about the origins of history, the races, and civilizations. Colonial ethnographers, before the professionalization of ethnography in the 20th century, fostered a colonial pluralism that left natives on their own as long as their leaders could be co-opted by the colonial administration.

European ethnographers studied Africans, Asians, and other Third World peoples of color. Early American ethnographers studied the American Indian from the perspective of the conqueror, who saw the lifeworld of the primitive as a window to the prehistoric past. The Calvinist mission to save the Indian was soon transferred to the mission of saving the “hordes” of immigrants who entered the United States with the beginnings of industrialization. Qualitative community studies of the ethnic Other proliferated from the early 1900s to the 1960s and included the work of E. Franklin Frazier, Robert Park, and Robert Redfield and their students, as well as William Foote Whyte, the Lynds, August Hollingshead, Herbert Gans, Stanford Lyman, Arthur Vidich, and Joseph Bensman. The post-1960 ethnicity studies challenged the “melting pot” hypotheses of Park and his followers and corresponded to the emergence of ethnic studies programs that saw Native Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and African Americans attempting to take control over the study of their own peoples.

The postmodern and poststructural challenge emerged in the mid-1980s. It questioned the assumptions that had organized this earlier history in each of its colonizing moments. Qualitative research that crosses the “postmodern divide” requires the scholar, Vidich and Lyman (2000) argue, to “abandon all established and preconceived values, theories, perspectives . . . and prejudices as resources for ethnographic study” (p. 60). In this new era the qualitative researcher does more than observe history; he or she plays a part in it. New tales from the field will now be written, and they will reflect the researchers’ direct and personal engagement with this historical period.

Vidich and Lyman’s analysis covers the full sweep of ethnographic history. Ours is confined to the 20th and 21st centuries and complements many of their divisions. We begin with the early foundational work of the British and French as well as the Chicago, Columbia, Harvard, Berkeley, and British schools of sociology and anthropology. This early foundational period established the norms of classical qualitative and ethnographic research (see Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Rosaldo, 1989; Stocking, 1989).

## ■ THE EIGHT MOMENTS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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As we have noted above, we divide our history of qualitative research in North America in the 20th century and beyond into eight phases, which we describe in turn below.

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## The Traditional Period

We call the first moment the traditional period (this covers the second and third phases discussed by Vidich & Lyman, 2000). It begins in the early 1900s and continues until World War II. In this period, qualitative researchers wrote “objective,” colonizing accounts of field experiences that were reflective of the positivist scientist paradigm. They were concerned with offering valid, reliable, and objective interpretations in their writings. The “Other” whom they studied was alien, foreign, and strange.

Here is Malinowski (1967) discussing his field experiences in New Guinea and the Trobriand Islands in the years 1914–1915 and 1917–1918. He is bartering his way into field data:

Nothing whatever draws me to ethnographic studies. . . . On the whole the village struck me rather unfavorably. There is a certain disorganization . . . the rowdiness and persistence of the people who laugh and stare and lie discouraged me somewhat. . . . Went to the village hoping to photograph a few stages of the *bara* dance. I handed out half-sticks of tobacco, then watched a few dances; then took pictures—but results were poor. . . . they would not pose long enough for time exposures. At moments I was furious at them, particularly because after I gave them their portions of tobacco they all went away. (quoted in Geertz, 1988, pp. 73–74)

In another work, this lonely, frustrated, isolated field-worker describes his methods in the following words:

In the field one has to face a chaos of facts. . . . in this crude form they are not scientific facts at all; they are absolutely elusive, and can only be fixed by interpretation. . . . *Only laws and generalizations are scientific facts*, and field work consists only and exclusively in the interpretation of the chaotic social reality, in subordinating it to general rules. (Malinowski, 1916/1948, p. 328; quoted in Geertz, 1988, p. 81)

Malinowski’s remarks are provocative. On the one hand they disparage fieldwork, but on the other they speak of it within the glorified language of science, with laws and generalizations fashioned out of this selfsame experience.

During this period the field-worker was lionized, made into a larger-than-life figure who went into the field and returned with stories about strange peoples. Rosaldo (1989) describes this as the period of the Lone Ethnographer, the story of the man-scientist who went off in search of his native in a distant land. There this figure “encountered the object of his quest . . . [and] underwent his rite of passage by enduring the ultimate ordeal of ‘fieldwork’” (p. 30). Returning home with his data, the Lone Ethnographer wrote up an objective account of the culture studied. This account was structured by the norms of classical ethnography. This sacred bundle of terms (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 31) organized ethnographic texts around four beliefs and commitments: a commitment to objectivism, a complicity with imperialism, a belief in

monumentalism (the ethnography would create a museumlike picture of the culture studied), and a belief in timelessness (what was studied would never change). The Other was an “object” to be archived. This model of the researcher, who could also write complex, dense theories about what was studied, holds to the present day.

The myth of the Lone Ethnographer depicts the birth of classic ethnography. The texts of Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Margaret Mead, and Gregory Bateson are still carefully studied for what they can tell the novice about fieldwork, taking field notes, and writing theory. But today the image of the Lone Ethnographer has been shattered. Many scholars see the works of the classic ethnographers as relics from the colonial past (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 44). Whereas some feel nostalgia for this past, others celebrate its passing. Rosaldo (1989) quotes Cora Du Bois, a retired Harvard anthropology professor, who lamented this passing at a conference in 1980, reflecting on the crisis in anthropology: “[I feel a distance] from the complexity and disarray of what I once found a justifiable and challenging discipline. . . . It has been like moving from a distinguished art museum into a garage sale” (p. 44).

Du Bois regards the classic ethnographies as pieces of timeless artwork contained in a museum. She feels uncomfortable in the chaos of the garage sale. In contrast, Rosaldo (1989) is drawn to this metaphor because “it provides a precise image of the postcolonial situation where cultural artifacts flow between unlikely places, and nothing is sacred, permanent, or sealed off. The image of anthropology as a garage sale depicts our present global situation” (p. 44). Indeed, many valuable treasures may be found in unexpected places, if one is willing to look long and hard. Old standards no longer hold. Ethnographies do not produce timeless truths. The commitment to objectivism is now in doubt. The complicity with imperialism is openly challenged today, and the belief in monumentalism is a thing of the past.

The legacies of this first period begin at the end of the 19th century, when the novel and the social sciences had become distinguished as separate systems of discourse (Clough, 1998, pp. 21–22). However, the Chicago school, with its emphasis on the life story and the “slice-of-life” approach to ethnographic materials, sought to develop an interpretive methodology that maintained the centrality of the narrated-life-history approach. This led to the production of texts that gave the researcher-as-author the power to represent the subject’s story. Written under the mantle of straightforward, sentiment-free social realism, these texts used the language of ordinary people. They articulated a social science version of literary naturalism, which often produced the sympathetic illusion that a solution to a social problem had been found. Like the Depression-era juvenile delinquent and other “social problems” films (Roffman & Purdy, 1981), these accounts romanticized the subject. They turned the deviant into a sociological version of a screen hero. These sociological stories, like their film counterparts, usually had happy endings, as they followed individuals through the three stages of the classic morality tale: being in a state of grace, being seduced by evil and falling, and finally achieving redemption through suffering.

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## Modernist Phase

The modernist phase, or second moment, builds on the canonical works from the traditional period. Social realism, naturalism, and slice-of-life ethnographies are still valued. This phase extended through the postwar years to the 1970s and is still present in the work of many (for reviews, see Wolcott, 1990, 1992, 1995; see also Tedlock, Volume 2, Chapter 5). In this period many texts sought to formalize qualitative methods (see, e.g., Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Cicourel, 1964; Filstead, 1970; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lofland, 1971, 1995; Lofland & Lofland, 1984, 1995; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).<sup>14</sup> The modernist ethnographer and sociological participant observer attempted rigorous qualitative studies of important social processes, including deviance and social control in the classroom and society. This was a moment of creative ferment.

A new generation of graduate students across the human disciplines encountered new interpretive theories (ethnomethodology, phenomenology, critical theory, feminism). They were drawn to qualitative research practices that would let them give a voice to society's underclass. Postpositivism functioned as a powerful epistemological paradigm. Researchers attempted to fit Campbell and Stanley's (1963) model of internal and external validity to constructionist and interactionist conceptions of the research act. They returned to the texts of the Chicago school as sources of inspiration (see Denzin, 1970, 1978).

A canonical text from this moment remains *Boys in White* (Becker et al., 1961; see also Becker, 1998). Firmly entrenched in mid-20th-century methodological discourse, this work attempted to make qualitative research as rigorous as its quantitative counterpart. Causal narratives were central to this project. This multimethod work combined open-ended and quasi-structured interviewing with participant observation and the careful analysis of such materials in standardized, statistical form. In his classic article "Problems of Inference and Proof in Participant Observation," Howard S. Becker (1958/1970) describes the use of quasi-statistics:

Participant observations have occasionally been gathered in standardized form capable of being transformed into legitimate statistical data. But the exigencies of the field usually prevent the collection of data in such a form to meet the assumptions of statistical tests, so that the observer deals in what have been called "quasi-statistics." His conclusions, while implicitly numerical, do not require precise quantification. (p. 31)

In the analysis of data, Becker notes, the qualitative researcher takes a cue from more quantitatively oriented colleagues. The researcher looks for probabilities or support for arguments concerning the likelihood that, or frequency with which, a conclusion in fact applies in a specific situation (see also Becker, 1998, pp. 166–170). Thus did work in the modernist period clothe itself in the language and rhetoric of positivist and postpositivist discourse.

This was the golden age of rigorous qualitative analysis, bracketed in sociology by *Boys in White* (Becker et al., 1961) at one end and *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*

(Glaser & Strauss, 1967) at the other. In education, qualitative research in this period was defined by George and Louise Spindler, Jules Henry, Harry Wolcott, and John Singleton. This form of qualitative research is still present in the work of scholars such as Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Ryan and Bernard (2000).

The “golden age” reinforced the picture of qualitative researchers as cultural romantics. Imbued with Promethean human powers, they valorized villains and outsiders as heroes to mainstream society. They embodied a belief in the contingency of self and society, and held to emancipatory ideals for “which one lives and dies.” They put in place a tragic and often ironic view of society and self, and joined a long line of leftist cultural romantics that included Emerson, Marx, James, Dewey, Gramsci, and Martin Luther King, Jr. (West, 1989, chap. 6).

As this moment came to an end, the Vietnam War was everywhere present in American society. In 1969, alongside these political currents, Herbert Blumer and Everett Hughes met with a group of young sociologists called the “Chicago Irregulars” at the American Sociological Association meetings held in San Francisco and shared their memories of the “Chicago years.” Lyn Lofland (1980) describes this time as a

moment of creative ferment—scholarly and political. The San Francisco meetings witnessed not simply the Blumer-Hughes event but a “counter-revolution.” . . . a group first came to . . . talk about the problems of being a sociologist and a female. . . the discipline seemed literally to be bursting with new . . . ideas: labelling theory, ethnomethodology, conflict theory, phenomenology, dramaturgical analysis. (p. 253)

Thus did the modernist phase come to an end.

### Blurred Genres

By the beginning of the third phase (1970–1986), which we call the moment of blurred genres, qualitative researchers had a full complement of paradigms, methods, and strategies to employ in their research. Theories ranged from symbolic interactionism to constructivism, naturalistic inquiry, positivism and postpositivism, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, critical theory, neo-Marxist theory, semiotics, structuralism, feminism, and various racial/ethnic paradigms. Applied qualitative research was gaining in stature, and the politics and ethics of qualitative research—implicated as they were in various applications of this work—were topics of considerable concern. Research strategies and formats for reporting research ranged from grounded theory to the case study, to methods of historical, biographical, ethnographic, action, and clinical research. Diverse ways of collecting and analyzing empirical materials were also available, including qualitative interviewing (open-ended and quasi-structured) and observational, visual, personal experience, and documentary methods. Computers were entering the situation, to be fully developed as aids in the analysis of qualitative data in the next decade,

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along with narrative, content, and semiotic methods of reading interviews and cultural texts.

Two books by Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) and *Local Knowledge* (1983), defined the beginning and the end of this moment. In these two works, Geertz argued that the old functional, positivist, behavioral, totalizing approaches to the human disciplines were giving way to a more pluralistic, interpretive, open-ended perspective. This new perspective took cultural representations and their meanings as its points of departure. Calling for “thick description” of particular events, rituals, and customs, Geertz suggested that all anthropological writings are interpretations of interpretations.<sup>15</sup> The observer has no privileged voice in the interpretations that are written. The central task of theory is to make sense out of a local situation.

Geertz went on to propose that the boundaries between the social sciences and the humanities had become blurred. Social scientists were now turning to the humanities for models, theories, and methods of analysis (semiotics, hermeneutics). A form of genre diaspora was occurring: documentaries that read like fiction (Mailer), parables posing as ethnographies (Castañeda), theoretical treatises that look like travelogues (Lévi-Strauss). At the same time, other new approaches were emerging: poststructuralism (Barthes), neopositivism (Philips), neo-Marxism (Althusser), micro-macro descriptivism (Geertz), ritual theories of drama and culture (V. Turner), deconstructionism (Derrida), ethnomethodology (Garfinkel). The golden age of the social sciences was over, and a new age of blurred, interpretive genres was upon us. The essay as an art form was replacing the scientific article. At issue now was the author’s presence in the interpretive text (Geertz, 1988). How can the researcher speak with authority in an age when there are no longer any firm rules concerning the text, including the author’s place in it, its standards of evaluation, and its subject matter?

The naturalistic, postpositivist, and constructionist paradigms gained power in this period, especially in education, in the works of Harry Wolcott, Frederick Erickson, Egon Guba, Yvonna Lincoln, Robert Stake, and Elliot Eisner. By the end of the 1970s, several qualitative journals were in place, including *Urban Life and Culture* (now *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*), *Cultural Anthropology*, *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, *Qualitative Sociology*, and *Symbolic Interaction*, as well as the book series *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*.

### Crisis of Representation

A profound rupture occurred in the mid-1980s. What we call the fourth moment, or the crisis of representation, appeared with *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (Marcus & Fischer, 1986), *The Anthropology of Experience* (Turner & Bruner, 1986), *Writing Culture* (Clifford & Marcus, 1986), *Works and Lives* (Geertz, 1988), and *The Predicament of Culture* (Clifford, 1988). These works made research and writing more reflexive and called into question the issues of gender, class, and race. They articulated the consequences of Geertz’s “blurred genres” interpretation of the field in the early 1980s.<sup>16</sup>

Qualitative researchers sought new models of truth, method, and representation (Rosaldo, 1989). The erosion of classic norms in anthropology (objectivism, complicity with colonialism, social life structured by fixed rituals and customs, ethnographies as monuments to a culture) was complete (Rosaldo, 1989, pp. 44–45; see also Jackson, 1998, pp. 7–8). Critical theory, feminist theory, and epistemologies of color now competed for attention in this arena. Issues such as validity, reliability, and objectivity, previously believed settled, were once more problematic. Pattern and interpretive theories, as opposed to causal, linear theories, were now more common, as writers continued to challenge older models of truth and meaning (Rosaldo, 1989).

Stoller and Olkes (1987, pp. 227–229) describe how they felt the crisis of representation in their fieldwork among the Songhay of Niger. Stoller observes: “When I began to write anthropological texts, I followed the conventions of my training. I ‘gathered data,’ and once the ‘data’ were arranged in neat piles, I ‘wrote them up.’ In one case I reduced Songhay insults to a series of neat logical formulas” (p. 227). Stoller became dissatisfied with this form of writing, in part because he learned “everyone had lied to me and . . . the data I has so painstakingly collected were worthless. I learned a lesson: Informants routinely lie to their anthropologists” (Stoller & Olkes, 1987, p. 9). This discovery led to a second—that he had, in following the conventions of ethnographic realism, edited himself out of his text. This led Stoller to produce a different type of text, a memoir, in which he became a central character in the story he told. This story, an account of his experiences in the Songhay world, became an analysis of the clash between his world and the world of Songhay sorcery. Thus Stoller’s journey represents an attempt to confront the crisis of representation in the fourth moment.

Clough (1998) elaborates this crisis and criticizes those who would argue that new forms of writing represent a way out of the crisis. She argues:

While many sociologists now commenting on the criticism of ethnography view writing as “downright central to the ethnographic enterprise” [Van Maanen, 1988, p. xi], the problems of writing are still viewed as different from the problems of method or fieldwork itself. Thus the solution usually offered is experiments in writing, that is a self-consciousness about writing. (p. 136)

It is this insistence on the difference between writing and fieldwork that must be analyzed. (Richardson & St. Pierre are quite articulate about this issue in Volume 3, Chapter 15).

In writing, the field-worker makes a claim to moral and scientific authority. This claim allows the realist and experimental ethnographic texts to function as sources of validation for an empirical science. They show that the world of real lived experience can still be captured, if only in the writer’s memoirs, or fictional experimentations, or dramatic readings. But these works have the danger of directing attention away from the ways in which the text constructs sexually situated individuals in a field of social difference. They also perpetuate “empirical science’s hegemony” (Clough, 1998, p. 8), for these new writing technologies of the subject become the site “for the production

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of knowledge/power . . . [aligned] with . . . the capital/state axis” (Aronowitz, 1988, p. 300; quoted in Clough, 1998, p. 8). Such experiments come up against, and then back away from, the difference between empirical science and social criticism. Too often they fail to engage fully a new politics of textuality that would “refuse the identity of empirical science” (Clough, 1998, p. 135). This new social criticism “would intervene in the relationship of information economics, nation-state politics, and technologies of mass communication, especially in terms of the empirical sciences” (Clough, 1998, p. 16). This, of course, is the terrain occupied by cultural studies.

In Chapter 15 of Volume 3, Richardson and St. Pierre develop the above arguments, viewing writing as a method of inquiry that moves through successive stages of self-reflection. As a series of written representations, the field-worker’s texts flow from the field experience, through intermediate works, to later work, and finally to the research text, which is the public presentation of the ethnographic and narrative experience. Thus fieldwork and writing blur into one another. There is, in the final analysis, no difference between writing and fieldwork. These two perspectives inform one another throughout every chapter in this volume. In these ways the crisis of representation moves qualitative research in new and critical directions.

### A Triple Crisis

The ethnographer’s authority remains under assault today (Behar, 1995, p. 3; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997, p. 16; Jackson, 1998; Ortner, 1997, p. 2). A triple crisis of representation, legitimation, and praxis confronts qualitative researchers in the human disciplines. Embedded in the discourses of poststructuralism and postmodernism (Vidich & Lyman, 2000; see also Richardson & St. Pierre, Volume 3, Chapter 15), these three crises are coded in multiple terms, variously called and associated with the *critical*, *interpretive*, *linguistic*, *feminist*, and *rhetorical* turns in social theory. These new turns make problematic two key assumptions of qualitative research. The first is that qualitative researchers can no longer directly capture lived experience. Such experience, it is argued, is created in the social text written by the researcher. This is the representational crisis. It confronts the inescapable problem of representation, but does so within a framework that makes the direct link between experience and text problematic.

The second assumption makes problematic the traditional criteria for evaluating and interpreting qualitative research. This is the legitimation crisis. It involves a serious rethinking of such terms as *validity*, *generalizability*, and *reliability*, terms already retheorized in postpositivist (Hammersley, 1992), constructionist-naturalistic (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, pp. 163–183), feminist (Olesen, Chapter 10, this volume), interpretive and performative (Denzin, 1997, 2003), poststructural (Lather, 1993; Lather & Smithies, 1997), and critical discourses (Kincheloe & McLaren, Chapter 12, this volume). This crisis asks, How are qualitative studies to be evaluated in the contemporary, poststructural moment? The first two crises shape the third, which asks,

Is it possible to effect change in the world if society is only and always a text? Clearly these crises intersect and blur, as do the answers to the questions they generate (see Ladson-Billings, 2000; Schwandt, 2000; Smith & Deemer, 2000).

The fifth moment, the postmodern period of experimental ethnographic writing, struggled to make sense of these crises. New ways of composing ethnography were explored (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). Theories were read as tales from the field. Writers struggled with different ways to represent the “Other,” although they were now joined by new representational concerns (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000; see also Fine & Weis, Chapter 3, this volume). Epistemologies from previously silenced groups emerged to offer solutions to these problems. The concept of the aloof observer was abandoned. More action, participatory, and activist-oriented research was on the horizon. The search for grand narratives was being replaced by more local, small-scale theories fitted to specific problems and specific situations.

The sixth moment, postexperimental inquiry (1995–2000), was a period of great excitement, with AltaMira Press, under the direction of Mitch Allen, taking the lead. AltaMira’s book series titled *Ethnographic Alternatives*, for which Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner served as series editors, captured this new excitement and brought a host of new authors into the interpretive community. The following description of the series from the publisher reflects its experimental tone: “Ethnographic Alternatives publishes experimental forms of qualitative writing that blur the boundaries between social sciences and humanities. Some volumes in the series . . . experiment with novel forms of expressing lived experience, including literary, poetic, autobiographical, multivoiced, conversational, critical, visual, performative and co-constructed representations.”

During this same period, two major new qualitative journals began publication: *Qualitative Inquiry* and *Qualitative Research*. The editors of these journals were committed to publishing the very best new work. The success of these ventures framed the seventh moment, what we are calling the methodologically contested present (2000–2004). As discussed above, this is a period of conflict, great tension, and, in some quarters, retrenchment.

The eighth moment is now, the future (2005– ). In this moment scholars, as reviewed above, are confronting the methodological backlash associated with “Bush science” and the evidence-based social movement.

## Reading History

We draw several conclusions from this brief history, noting that it is, like all histories, somewhat arbitrary. First, each of the earlier historical moments is still operating in the present, either as legacy or as a set of practices that researchers continue to follow or argue against. The multiple and fractured histories of qualitative research now make it possible for any given researcher to attach a project to a canonical text from any of the above-described historical moments. Multiple criteria of evaluation compete for attention in this field. Second, an embarrassment of choices now characterizes the field

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of qualitative research. Researchers have never before had so many paradigms, strategies of inquiry, and methods of analysis to draw upon and utilize. Third, we are in a moment of discovery and rediscovery, as new ways of looking, interpreting, arguing, and writing are debated and discussed. Fourth, the qualitative research act can no longer be viewed from within a neutral or objective positivist perspective. Class, race, gender, and ethnicity shape inquiry, making research a multicultural process. Fifth, we are clearly not implying a progress narrative with our history. We are not saying that the cutting edge is located in the present. We are saying that the present is a politically charged space. Complex pressures both within and outside of the qualitative community are working to erase the positive developments of the past 30 years.

### ■ QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AS PROCESS

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Three interconnected, generic activities define the qualitative research process. They go by a variety of different labels, including *theory*, *analysis*, *ontology*, *epistemology*, and *methodology*. Behind these terms stands the personal biography of the researcher, who speaks from a particular class, gender, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective. The gendered, multiculturally situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology) that he or she then examines in specific ways (methodology, analysis). That is, the researcher collects empirical materials bearing on the question and then analyzes and writes about those materials. Every researcher speaks from within a distinct interpretive community that configures, in its special way, the multicultural, gendered components of the research act.

In this volume we treat these generic activities under five headings, or phases: the researcher and the researched as multicultural subjects, major paradigms and interpretive perspectives, research strategies, methods of collecting and analyzing empirical materials, and the art of interpretation. Behind and within each of these phases stands the biographically situated researcher. This individual enters the research process from inside an interpretive community. This community has its own historical research traditions, which constitute a distinct point of view. This perspective leads the researcher to adopt particular views of the “Other” who is studied. At the same time, the politics and the ethics of research must also be considered, for these concerns permeate every phase of the research process.

### ■ THE OTHER AS RESEARCH SUBJECT

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Since its early 20th-century birth in modern, interpretive form, qualitative research has been haunted by a double-faced ghost. On the one hand, qualitative researchers have assumed that qualified, competent observers can, with objectivity, clarity, and

precision, report on their own observations of the social world, including the experiences of others. Second, researchers have held to the belief in a real subject, or real individual, who is present in the world and able, in some form, to report on his or her experiences. So armed, researchers could blend their own observations with the self-reports provided by subjects through interviews and life story, personal experience, and case study documents.

These two beliefs have led qualitative researchers across disciplines to seek a method that will allow them to record accurately their own observations while also uncovering the meanings their subjects bring to their life experiences. Such a method would rely on the subjective verbal and written expressions of meaning given by the individuals studied as windows into the inner lives of these persons. Since Dilthey (1900/1976), this search for a method has led to a perennial focus in the human disciplines on qualitative, interpretive methods.

Recently, as noted above, this position and its beliefs have come under assault. Poststructuralists and postmodernists have contributed to the understanding that there is no clear window into the inner life of an individual. Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of—and between—the observer and the observed. Subjects, or individuals, are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions; all they can offer are accounts, or stories, about what they have done and why. No single method can grasp all the subtle variations in ongoing human experience. Consequently, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive methods, always seeking better ways to make more understandable the worlds of experience they have studied.

Table 1.1 depicts the relationships we see among the five phases that define the research process. Behind all but one of these phases stands the biographically situated researcher. These five levels of activity, or practice, work their way through the biography of the researcher. We take them up briefly in order here; we discuss these phases more fully in our introductions to the individual parts of this volume.

### Phase 1: The Researcher

Our remarks above indicate the depth and complexity of the traditional and applied qualitative research perspectives into which a socially situated researcher enters. These traditions locate the researcher in history, simultaneously guiding and constraining the work that is done in any specific study. This field has always been characterized by diversity and conflict, and these are its most enduring traditions (see Greenwood & Levin, Chapter 2, this volume). As a carrier of this complex and contradictory history, the researcher must also confront the ethics and politics of research (see in this volume Fine & Weis, Chapter 3; Smith, Chapter 4; Bishop, Chapter 5; Christians, Chapter 6). Researching the native, the indigenous Other, while claiming to engage in value-free inquiry for the human disciplines is over. Today researchers

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**Table 1.1.** The Research Process*Phase 1: The Researcher as a Multicultural Subject*

History and research traditions  
 Conceptions of self and the Other  
 The ethics and politics of research

*Phase 2: Theoretical Paradigms and Perspectives*

Positivism, postpositivism  
 Interpretivism, constructivism, hermeneutics  
 Feminism(s)  
 Racialized discourses  
 Critical theory and Marxist models  
 Cultural studies models  
 Queer theory

*Phase 3: Research Strategies*

Design  
 Case study  
 Ethnography, participant observation, performance ethnography  
 Phenomenology, ethnomethodology  
 Grounded theory  
 Life history, *testimonio*  
 Historical method  
 Action and applied research  
 Clinical research

*Phase 4: Methods of Collection and Analysis*

Interviewing  
 Observing  
 Artifacts, documents, and records  
 Visual methods  
 Autoethnography  
 Data management methods  
 Computer-assisted analysis  
 Textual analysis  
 Focus groups  
 Applied ethnography

*Phase 5: The Art, Practices, and Politics of Interpretation and Evaluation*

Criteria for judging adequacy  
 Practices and politics of interpretation  
 Writing as interpretation  
 Policy analysis  
 Evaluation traditions  
 Applied research

struggle to develop situational and trans-situational ethics that apply to all forms of the research act and its human-to-human relationships. We no longer have the option of deferring the decolonization project.

## Phase 2: Interpretive Paradigms

All qualitative researchers are philosophers in that “universal sense in which all human beings . . . are guided by highly abstract principles” (Bateson, 1972, p. 320). These principles combine beliefs about ontology (What kind of being is the human being? What is the nature of reality?), epistemology (What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known?), and methodology (How do we know the world, or gain knowledge of it?) (see Guba, 1990, p. 18; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 14–15; see also Guba & Lincoln, Chapter 8, this volume). These beliefs shape how the qualitative researcher sees the world and acts in it. The researcher is “bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises which—regardless of ultimate truth or falsity—become partially self-validating” (Bateson, 1972, p. 314).

The net that contains the researcher’s epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises may be termed a *paradigm*, or an interpretive framework, a “basic set of beliefs that guides action” (Guba, 1990, p. 17). All research is interpretive; it is guided by the researcher’s set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied. Some beliefs may be taken for granted, invisible, only assumed, whereas others are highly problematic and controversial. Each interpretive paradigm makes particular demands on the researcher, including the questions the researcher asks and the interpretations he or she brings to them.

At the most general level, four major interpretive paradigms structure qualitative research: positivist and postpositivist, constructivist-interpretive, critical (Marxist, emancipatory), and feminist-poststructural. These four abstract paradigms become more complicated at the level of concrete specific interpretive communities. At this level it is possible to identify not only the constructivist, but also multiple versions of feminism (Afrocentric and poststructural),<sup>17</sup> as well as specific ethnic, Marxist, and cultural studies paradigms. These perspectives, or paradigms, are examined in Part II of this volume.

The paradigms examined in Part II work against and alongside (and some within) the positivist and postpositivist models. They all work within relativist ontologies (multiple constructed realities), interpretive epistemologies (the knower and known interact and shape one another), and interpretive, naturalistic methods.

Table 1.2 presents these paradigms and their assumptions, including their criteria for evaluating research, and the typical form that an interpretive or theoretical statement assumes in each paradigm.<sup>18</sup> These paradigms are explored in considerable detail in the chapters in Part II by Guba and Lincoln (Chapter 8), Olesen (Chapter 10), Ladson-Billings and Donnor (Chapter 11), Kincheloe and McLaren (Chapter 12), Saukko (Chapter 13), and Plummer (Chapter 14). We have discussed the positivist and

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**Table 1.2.** Interpretive Paradigms

<i>Paradigm/Theory</i>	<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Form of Theory</i>	<i>Type of Narration</i>
Positivist/ postpositivist	Internal, external validity	Logical- deductive, grounded	Scientific report
Constructivist	Trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, confirmability	Substantive- formal	Interpretive case studies, ethnographic fiction
Feminist	Afrocentric, lived experience, dialogue, caring, accountability, race, class, gender, reflexivity, praxis, emotion, concrete grounding	Critical, standpoint	Essays, stories, experimental writing
Ethnic	Afrocentric, lived experience, dialogue, caring, accountability, race, class, gender	Standpoint, critical, historical	Essays, fables, dramas
Marxist	Emancipatory theory, falsifiability dialogical, race, class, gender	Critical, historical, economic	Historical, economic, sociocultural analyses
Cultural studies	Cultural practices, praxis, social texts, subjectivities	Social criticism	Cultural theory as criticism
Queer theory	Reflexivity, deconstruction	Social criticism, historical analysis	Theory as criticism, autobiography

postpositivist paradigms above. They work from within a realist and critical realist ontology and objective epistemologies, and they rely on experimental, quasi-experimental, survey, and rigorously defined qualitative methodologies. Ryan and Bernard (2000) have developed elements of this paradigm.

The constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent cocreate understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures. Findings are usually presented in terms of the criteria of grounded theory or pattern theories

(see Guba & Lincoln, Chapter 8, this volume; Charmaz, Volume 2, Chapter 7; see also Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Terms such as *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability* replace the usual positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity.

Feminist, ethnic, Marxist, cultural studies, and queer theory models privilege a materialist-realist ontology; that is, the real world makes a material difference in terms of race, class, and gender. Subjectivist epistemologies and naturalistic methodologies (usually ethnographies) are also employed. Empirical materials and theoretical arguments are evaluated in terms of their emancipatory implications. Criteria from gender and racial communities (e.g., African American) may be applied (emotionality and feeling, caring, personal accountability, dialogue).

Poststructural feminist theories emphasize problems with the social text, its logic, and its inability ever to represent the world of lived experience fully. Positivist and postpositivist criteria of evaluation are replaced by other criteria, including the reflexive, multivoiced text that is grounded in the experiences of oppressed peoples.

The cultural studies and queer theory paradigms are multifocused, with many different strands drawing from Marxism, feminism, and the postmodern sensibility (see in this volume Saukko, Chapter 13; Plummer, Chapter 14; Richardson & St. Pierre, Volume 3, Chapter 15). There is a tension between a humanistic cultural studies, which stresses lived experiences (meaning), and a more structural cultural studies project, which stresses the structural and material determinants (race, class, gender) and effects of experience. Of course, there are two sides to every coin, and both sides are needed—indeed, both are critical. The cultural studies and queer theory paradigms use methods strategically—that is, as resources for understanding and for producing resistances to local structures of domination. Scholars may do close textual readings and discourse analyses of cultural texts (see Olesen, Chapter 10, this volume; Saukko, Chapter 13; Chase, Volume 3, Chapter 2) as well as local, online, reflexive, and critical ethnographies, open-ended interviewing, and participant observation. The focus is on how race, class, and gender are produced and enacted in historically specific situations.

Paradigm and personal history in hand, focused on a concrete empirical problem to examine, the researcher now moves to the next stage of the research process—namely, working with a specific strategy of inquiry.

### Phase 3: Strategies of Inquiry and Interpretive Paradigms

Table 1.1 presents some of the major strategies of inquiry a researcher may use. Phase 3 begins with research design, which, broadly conceived, involves a clear focus on the research question, the purposes of the study, and “what information most appropriately will answer specific research questions, and which strategies are most effective for obtaining it” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 30; see also Cheek, Volume 2, Chapter 2). A research design describes a flexible set of guidelines that connect theoretical paradigms first to strategies of inquiry and second to methods for collecting empirical

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materials. A research design situates the researcher in the empirical world and connects him or her to specific sites, persons, groups, institutions, and bodies of relevant interpretive material, including documents and archives. A research design also specifies how the investigator will address the two critical issues of representation and legitimation.

A strategy of inquiry comprises a bundle of skills, assumptions, and practices that the researcher employs as he or she moves from paradigm to the empirical world. Strategies of inquiry put paradigms of interpretation into motion. At the same time, strategies of inquiry also connect the researcher to specific methods of collecting and analyzing empirical materials. For example, the case study strategy relies on interviewing, observing, and document analysis. Research strategies implement and anchor paradigms in specific empirical sites or in specific methodological practices, such as making a case an object of study. These strategies include the case study, phenomenological and ethnomethodological techniques, and the use of grounded theory, as well as biographical, autoethnographic, historical, action, and clinical methods. Each of these strategies is connected to a complex literature, and each has a separate history, exemplary works, and preferred ways of putting the strategy into motion.

#### Phase 4: Methods of Collecting and Analyzing Empirical Materials

Qualitative researchers employ several methods for collecting empirical materials.<sup>19</sup> These methods, which are taken up in Volume 3, Part I (Part IV in the *Handbook*), include interviewing; direct observation; the analysis of artifacts, documents, and cultural records; the use of visual materials; and the use of personal experience. The researcher may also read and analyze interviews or cultural texts in a variety of different ways, including content, narrative, and semiotic strategies. Faced with large amounts of qualitative materials, the investigator seeks ways of managing and interpreting these documents, and here data management methods and computer-assisted models of analysis may be of use.

#### Phase 5: The Art and Politics of Interpretation and Evaluation

Qualitative research is endlessly creative and interpretive. The researcher does not just leave the field with mountains of empirical materials and then easily write up his or her findings. Qualitative interpretations are constructed. The researcher first creates a field text consisting of field notes and documents from the field, what Roger Sanjek (1990, p. 386) calls “indexing” and David Plath (1990, p. 374) calls “filework.” The writer-as-interpreter moves from this text to a research text: notes and interpretations based on the field text. This text is then re-created as a working interpretive document that contains the writer’s initial attempts to make sense of what he or she has learned. Finally, the writer produces the public text that comes to the reader. This final tale from the field may assume several forms: confessional, realist, impressionistic, critical, formal, literary, analytic, grounded theory, and so on (see Van Maanen, 1988).

The interpretive practice of making sense of one's findings is both artistic and political. Multiple criteria for evaluating qualitative research now exist, and those that we emphasize stress the situated, relational, and textual structures of the ethnographic experience. There is no single interpretive truth. As we argued earlier, there are multiple interpretive communities, each with its own criteria for evaluating interpretations.

Program evaluation is a major site of qualitative research, and qualitative researchers can influence social policy in important ways. The chapters in this volume by Greenwood and Levin (Chapter 2), Kemmis and McTaggart (Volume 2, Chapter 10), Miller and Crabtree (Volume 2, Chapter 11), Tedlock (Volume 2, Chapter 5), Smith and Hodkinson (Volume 3, Chapter 13), and House (Volume 3, Chapter 19) trace and discuss the rich history of applied qualitative research in the social sciences. This is the critical site where theory, method, praxis, action, and policy all come together. Qualitative researchers can isolate target populations, show the immediate effects of certain programs on such groups, and isolate the constraints that operate against policy changes in such settings. Action-oriented and clinically oriented qualitative researchers can also create spaces where those who are studied (the Other) can speak. The evaluator becomes the conduit for making such voices heard.

## ■ BRIDGING THE HISTORICAL MOMENTS: WHAT COMES NEXT?

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In Chapter 15 of Volume 3, Richardson and St. Pierre argue that we are already in the post-“post” period—post-poststructuralism, post-postmodernism, post-postexperimentalism. What this means for interpretive ethnographic practices is still not clear, but it is certain that things will never again be the same. We are in a new age where messy, uncertain, multivoiced texts, cultural criticism, and new experimental works will become more common, as will more reflexive forms of fieldwork, analysis, and intertextual representation. The subject of our final essays in Volume 3 is these sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth moments. It is true that, as the poet said, the center no longer holds. We can reflect on what should be at the new center.

Thus we come full circle. Returning to our bridge metaphor, the chapters that follow take the researcher back and forth through every phase of the research act. Like a good bridge, the chapters provide for two-way traffic, coming and going between moments, formations, and interpretive communities. Each chapter examines the relevant histories, controversies, and current practices that are associated with each paradigm, strategy, and method. Each chapter also offers projections for the future, where a specific paradigm, strategy, or method will be 10 years from now, deep into the formative years of the 21st century.

In reading the chapters that follow, it is important to remember that the field of qualitative research is defined by a series of tensions, contradictions, and hesitations. These tensions work back and forth between and among the broad, doubting postmodern

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sensibility; the more certain, more traditional positivist, postpositivist, and naturalistic conceptions of this project; and an increasingly conservative, neoliberal global environment. All of the chapters that follow are caught in and articulate these tensions.

## ■ NOTES

1. Recall bell hooks's (1990, p. 127) reading of the famous photo of Stephen Tyler doing fieldwork in India that appears on the cover of *Writing Culture* (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). In the picture, Tyler is seated at some distance from three dark-skinned persons. One, a child, is poking his or her head out of a basket. A woman is hidden in the shadows of the hut. A man, a checkered white-and-black shawl across his shoulder, elbow propped on his knee, hand resting along the side of his face, is staring at Tyler. Tyler is writing in a field journal. A piece of white cloth is attached to his glasses, perhaps shielding him from the sun. This patch of whiteness marks Tyler as the white male writer studying these passive brown and black persons. Indeed, the brown male's gaze signals some desire, or some attachment to Tyler. In contrast, the female's gaze is completely hidden by the shadows and by the words of the book's title, which are printed across her face.

2. Qualitative research has separate and distinguished histories in education, social work, communications, psychology, history, organizational studies, medical science, anthropology, and sociology.

3. Some definitions are in order here. *Positivism* asserts that objective accounts of the real world can be given. *Postpositivism* holds that only partially objective accounts of the world can be produced, for all methods for examining such accounts are flawed. According to *foundationalism*, we can have an ultimate grounding for our knowledge claims about the world, and this involves the use of empiricist and positivist epistemologies (Schwandt, 1997a, p. 103). *Nonfoundationalism* holds that we can make statements about the world without "recourse to ultimate proof or foundations for that knowing" (Schwandt, 1997a, p. 102). *Quasi-foundationalism* holds that we can make certain knowledge claims about the world based on neorealist criteria, including the correspondence concept of truth; there is an independent reality that can be mapped (see Smith & Hodgkinson, Volume 3, Chapter 13).

4. Jameson (1991, pp. 3–4) reminds us that any periodization hypothesis is always suspect, even one that rejects linear, stagelike models. It is never clear to what reality a stage refers, and what divides one stage from another is always debatable. Our eight moments are meant to mark discernible shifts in style, genre, epistemology, ethics, politics, and aesthetics.

5. Several scholars have termed this model a *progress narrative* (Alasuutari, 2004, pp. 599–600; Seale, Gobo, Gubrium, & Silverman, 2004, p. 2). Critics assert that we believe that the most recent moment is the most up-to-date, the avant-garde, the cutting edge (Alasuutari, 2004, p. 601). Naturally, we dispute this reading. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003, pp. 5–8) have modified our historical periods to fit their historical analysis of the major moments in the emergence of the use of mixed methods in social science research in the past century.

6. Some additional definitions are needed here. *Structuralism* holds that any system is made up of a set of oppositional categories embedded in language. *Semiotics* is the science of signs or sign systems—a structuralist project. According to *poststructuralism*, language is an unstable system of referents, thus it is impossible ever to capture completely the meaning of an

action, text, or intention. *Postmodernism* is a contemporary sensibility, developing since World War II, that privileges no single authority, method, or paradigm. *Hermeneutics* is an approach to the analysis of texts that stresses how prior understandings and prejudices shape the interpretive process. *Phenomenology* is a complex system of ideas associated with the works of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Alfred Schutz. *Cultural studies* is a complex, interdisciplinary field that merges critical theory, feminism, and poststructuralism.

7. Of course, all settings are natural—that is, places where everyday experiences take place. Qualitative researchers study people doing things together in the places where these things are done (Becker, 1986). There is no field site or natural place where one goes to do this kind of work (see also Gupta & Ferguson, 1997, p. 8). The site is constituted through the researcher's interpretive practices. Historically, analysts have distinguished between experimental (laboratory) and field (natural) research settings, hence the argument that qualitative research is naturalistic. Activity theory erases this distinction (Keller & Keller, 1996, p. 20; Vygotsky, 1978).

8. According to Weinstein and Weinstein (1991), "The meaning of *bricoleur* in French popular speech is 'someone who works with his (or her) hands and uses devious means compared to those of the craftsman.' . . . the *bricoleur* is practical and gets the job done" (p. 161). These authors provide a history of the term, connecting it to the works of the German sociologist and social theorist Georg Simmel and, by implication, Baudelaire. Hammersley (1999) disputes our use of this term. Following Lévi-Strauss, he reads the *bricoleur* as a mythmaker. He suggests that the term be replaced with the notion of the boat-builder. Hammersley also quarrels with our "moments" model of the history of qualitative research, contending that it implies some sense of progress.

9. Brian De Palma reproduced this baby carriage scene in his 1987 film *The Untouchables*.

10. In the harbor, the muzzles of the *Potemkin's* two huge guns swing slowly toward the camera. Words on the screen inform us, "The brutal military power answered by guns of the battleship." A final famous three-shot montage sequence shows first a sculpture of a sleeping lion, then a lion rising from his sleep, and finally the lion roaring, symbolizing the rage of the Russian people (Cook, 1981, p. 167). In this sequence Eisenstein uses montage to expand time, creating a psychological duration for this horrible event. By drawing out this sequence, by showing the baby in the carriage, the soldiers firing on the citizens, the blood on the mother's glove, the descending carriage on the steps, he suggests a level of destruction of great magnitude.

11. Here it is relevant to make a distinction between techniques that are used across disciplines and methods that are used within disciplines. Ethnomethodologists, for example, employ their approach as a method, whereas others selectively borrow that method as a technique for their own applications. Harry Wolcott (personal communication, 1993) suggests this distinction. It is also relevant to make distinctions among topic, method, and resource. Methods can be studied as topics of inquiry; that is how a case study gets done. In this ironic, ethnomethodological sense, method is both a resource and a topic of inquiry.

12. Indeed, any attempt to give an essential definition of qualitative research requires a qualitative analysis of the circumstances that produce such a definition.

13. In this sense all research is qualitative, because "the observer is at the center of the research process" (Vidich & Lyman, 2000, p. 39).

14. See Lincoln and Guba (1985) for an extension and elaboration of this tradition in the mid-1980s, and for more recent extensions see Taylor and Bogdan (1998) and Creswell (1998).

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15. Greenblatt (1997, pp. 15–18) offers a useful deconstructive reading of the many meanings and practices Geertz brings to the term *thick description*.
16. These works marginalized and minimized the contributions of standpoint feminist theory and research to this discourse (see Behar, 1995, p. 3; Gordon, 1995, p. 432).
17. Olesen (Chapter 10, this volume) identifies three strands of feminist research: mainstream empirical, standpoint and cultural studies, and poststructural, postmodern. She places Afrocentric and other models of color under the cultural studies and postmodern categories.
18. These, of course, are our interpretations of these paradigms and interpretive styles.
19. *Empirical materials* is the preferred term for what traditionally have been described as data.

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