Variety in Qualitative Inquiry

Theoretical Orientations

Special Gifts

"Tell us again, Master, how it was in the beginning."

"In the beginning special gifts were given to different groups of people. The caregivers were endowed with compassion for the less fortunate. The engineers were given the ability to see what was not yet there. The carpenters were given patience to set straight lines and perfect angles. The technicians were provided with diligence so that they might conscientiously follow the blueprints and detailed directions of others. The experimental scientists were given the certain belief that the world could be manipulated according to their vision of it. The qualitative inquirers were gifted with a passion for depth, detail, and understanding meanings. And so it went until, finally, there remained one last group and one last gift. These were the explorers. To them was given the gift of curiosity that they might forever see new worlds and uncover the many wonders of the world."

"But what of the evaluators?" the children asked. "You have not mentioned their special gift."

Halcolm smiled. "The evaluators, dear children, were spread throughout all the other groups, each endowed with the special gift of his or her own group, and each using that gift in a special way."

"But does that not make for much arguing among evaluators about who has the most special gift of all?"

Halcolm grinned.

—from Halcolm’s Origins of Human Species
From Core Strategies to Rich Diversity

The last chapter presented 12 primary threads that are woven through the tapestry of qualitative inquiry. A central point of that chapter was that different purposes, situations, questions, and resources will affect the degree to which such qualitative ideals as naturalistic inquiry, a holistic perspective, and inductive analysis can be realized in practice. Yet, despite variation along the several dimensions of qualitative inquiry, there are still core strategies and directions that differentiate a qualitative/naturalistic strategy from a quantitative/experimental one, as well as places where they can usefully be combined to complement each other (e.g., Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998). This chapter will present the rich menu of alternative possibilities within qualitative research by focusing on different theoretical perspectives that are associated with qualitative inquiry.

Qualitative inquiry is not a single, monolithic approach to research and evaluation. Discussions such as that in Chapter 2 that focus on differentiating primary strategies of qualitative/naturalistic methods from those of quantitative/experimental methods can leave the impression that there are only two methodological or paradigmatic alternatives. In fact, as we "turn inward in qualitative research," we find "an exhilarating and at times exhausting proliferation of types within the qualitative paradigm (Page 2000b)."

When one looks more closely ... the apparent unity of the qualitative approach vanishes, and one sees considerable diversity. What has been called "qualitative research" conveys different meanings to different people. Nondescript, to say, this has caused considerable confusion. ... A major source of the confusion lies in discounting qualitative research as if it were our approach (Jacob 1988a).

Major social sciences have drawn on and contributed to qualitative methods in different ways depending on the interests of theorists and methodologists in a particular discipline (cf. Brizuela et al. 2000; Kuhns and Martorana 1982). The language of discourse also varies. As Schwandt (1997a) has observed in his very useful dictionary of qualitative terminology:

Qualitative inquiry ... is a set of multiple practices in which words in methodological and philosophical vocabularies acquire different meanings in their use or in particular acts of speaking about the meaning of the practice. These different ways of speaking form something more like a constellation of contested practices than an integrated, readily surveyable order. There are multiple sources and kinds of disputes, but generally they involve different ways of conceiving of the aim of qualitative inquiry stemming from different traditions of thought (p. xiv).

These coming new to qualitative inquiry are understandably confused and even discomfited by the diverse terminology and contested practices they encounter. Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Ethnomethodology, Semiotics, Heuristics, Phenomenography, Such language! Exhibit 3.1 reproduces a letter of lamentation I received following publication of the first edition of this book, which did not include the current chapter.

This chapter sorts through some of the major perspectives and traditions that inform the rich variety that is qualitative inquiry. We shall look at how varying theoretical traditions emphasize different questions and how these particular emphases can

---

EXHIBIT 3.1 Which Approach Is Right?

Help!

Dear Dr. Patton:

I desperately need your help. I am a graduate student in education, planning to do my dissertation observing classrooms and teachers identified as innovative and effective. I want to see if they share any common approaches or wisdom that might be considered "best practices." I took this idea to one professor who asked me if I was proposing a phenomenological or grounded theory study. When I asked what the difference was, he said it was my job to find out. I’ve read about both but am still confused. Another professor told me I could do a qualitative study, but that asking about "best practices" meant that I was a positivist not a phenomenologist. Another grad student was told to "use a hermeneutic framing," but she’s in a different department with a different topic. I’m a former schoolteacher and, I think, a pretty good observer and interviewer. I got very excited reading your book about the value of in-depth observations and interviewing, and that’s where I got the idea for my dissertation, but now I’m being told I have to fit into one of these categories. Please tell me which one is right for my study. I don’t care which one it is. I just want to get on with studying innovative classrooms. I feel lost and am on the verge of just doing a questionnaire where these philosophy questions don’t seem to get asked. But if you can tell me which approach is right, I might still be able to do what I want to do. Help!!!

Dear: 

Your dilemma is common. The distinctions you’re being asked to make are, indeed, difficult—and not everyone agrees about what these terms and traditions mean. I didn’t include them in my book in the hopes that the methods of in-depth interviewing and observation could stand on their own. As you’ve discovered, you don’t need a class in philosophy to design good questionnaires, though an argument can be made that people using questionnaires and statistics would benefit from reflection on their epistemological (nature and justification of knowledge) and ontological (nature of reality) assumptions. Unfortunately, a lot of qualitative courses spend more time on methodology than methods, which may make students better philosophers than interviewers. Some balance is needed. Your professors are doing you a service by having you struggle with understanding different qualitative schools of thought because what approach you take does make a difference—and students of qualitative inquiry should be expected to know at least the major competing and contrasting traditions, just as those doing statistical tests need to understand what different tests do. In the next edition of my book I’ll include a chapter reviewing major philosophical and methodological traditions. But that won’t help you now.

To answer your question directly, there is no "right" approach any more than there is a "right" fruit—apples, oranges, passion fruit. What you eat is a matter of personal taste, availability, price, history, and preference. Since you are also serving others (your doctoral committee), their preferences come into play, as you well know. Each tradition of qualitative inquiry offers a different emphasis, framework, or focus. I am reluctant to offer a recommendation about which tradition fits your work best, but

(continued)
and qualitative methods will reveal a rich tapestry with many threads of differing texture, color, length, and purpose. This chapter will be of particular interest to social scientists conducting basic or applied research, and students doing dissertations, because their work is typically based on and aimed at contributing to theory. The next chapter, in contrast, will focus on practical and concrete evaluation and action research questions appropriate for qualitative inquiry, though theoretical understandings can be important for practitioners and policy analysis because "theoretical conceptions shape public arguments, giving people the concepts they use and shaping the alternatives they consider" (Nussbaum 2001:35).

First, because you portray yourself as a pragmatic, experienced practitioner, you could frame your study as qualitative, utilization-focused evaluation research (Patton 1997a). You have to specify intended users for your study (for example, innovative teachers and curriculum designers) and intended uses (facilitating discussing about "effective practices"). This puts you in a tradition of generating practical and useful knowledge for action in the tradition of reflective practice (Schon 1983). Your focus would be perceived patterns of effectiveness.

If that doesn't work and your committee insists on a more explicitly philosophical or theoretical framework for your inquiry, you might consider either "social constructionism" or "realism," which are two of the most general (and contradictive) of the traditions informing qualitative inquiry. I must warn you that there are competing versions of constructionism and realism (academics without arguments are like parades without costumes or sports teams without uniforms—it's how the players differentiate themselves and figure out who to applaud). Either of these traditions will guide you in thinking about how people in particular contexts (in your case, school) individually and collectively construct meaning and knowledge (in your case, effective or "best" practices).

The third alternative involves a change of topic, which may sound like bad news. The good news is that you've already collected a lot of the data. You could do a dissertation on the social constructions of qualitative paradigms using your professors as subjects. Obviously, you've already been doing participant observation on this topic. Or you might do a hermeneutic study of qualitative terminology. Or a phenomenological study on the experience of graduate students trying to frame a qualitative research design stage when the focus of fieldwork is determined. Weaving a tapestry with many threads of differing texture, color, length, and purpose, the divergent theoretical and philosophical traditions that have influenced qualitative inquiry: interpretivism, hermeneutics, and social constructionism. Crotty (1998) also offers three primary epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: interpretivism, hermeneutics, and social constructionism. Crutchley (1986) also offers three primary epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: interpretivism, hermeneutics, and social constructionism.

Best wishes, whatever you decide.

Michael Quinn Patton

EXHIBIT 3.1

Alternative Ways of Distinguishing Qualitative Traditions

There is no definitive way to categorize the various philosophical and theoretical perspectives that have influenced and that distinguish types of qualitative inquiry. Lincoln and Guba (2000) identify five "alternative inquiry paradigms": positivism, postpositivism, critical theory, constructivism, and participatory. Schwandt (2000) discusses "three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: interpretivism, hermeneutics, and social constructionism." Crotty (1998) also offers three primary epistemological stances: positivism, constructivism, and interpretivism; these, he posits, have influenced in varying degrees different theoretical perspectives: positivism (and postpositivism), interpretivism (symbolic interaction, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and social constructionism). Creswell (1998) distinguishes "five qualitative traditions of inquiry": biographical, phenomenonology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. While there is some overlap among these frameworks, there are also important differences reflecting varying experiences with and emphases within the history of qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (2000b) in their introduction to the Handbook of Qualitative Research trace six phases of qualitative research history that help explain the dramatically varying conceptions of what constitutes qualitative research.

1. During the "traditional period" of colonial research (up to World War II), ethnographers, influenced by positivism, strove for objectivity in their fieldwork and reports.

2. The "modernist phase" (to the 1970s) was a time in which qualitative researchers emphasized methodological rigor and procedural formalism as they sought acceptance within social science and reacted against postpositivism's emergent emphasis on interpretivism.

3. During the "blurred genres phase" (1970-1986), a large number of alternative approaches emerged, creating competition and confusion, the legacy of which remains in the daunting jargon and labels of qualitative perspectives: structuralism, symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, ethnography, critical theory, feminism, and postmodernism. Creswell (1990) describes "five qualitative traditions of inquiry": biographical, phenomenonology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study.

4. The "fifth moment" describes recent trends focused on issues of reflexivity, power, privilege, race, gender, and socioeconomic class—all of which underlined traditional notions of validity and neutrality.

5. The "fifth moment" describes recent trends focused on issues of reflexivity, power, privilege, race, gender, and socioeconomic class—all of which underlined traditional notions of validity and neutrality.
CONCEPTUAL ISSUES IN QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

 qualitative writing is put under the microscope, including the perspective of the qualitative writer, and searching questions are raised about how to evaluate the quality of qualitative research and evaluation. During this period, more activist, explicitly political, and participatory approaches sought legitimacy as, for example, in "empowerment evaluation" (Fetterman, Kaftarian, and Wandersman 1996) and using qualitative/interpretive writing "to advance the promises of radical democratic racial justice embodied in the post-civil rights, Chicana/Chicano and Black Arts Aesthetic movements" (Denzin 2000a:256).

6. In the sixth phase, which Denzin and Lincoln call "post-experimental," the boundaries of qualitative inquiry are expanded to include creative nonfiction, autobiographical ethnography, poetic representations, and multimedia presentations.

They clearly expect qualitative inquiry to continue developing in new directions for which they call the future the "seventh moment"—or perhaps this will be the moment of rest, when qualitative researchers cease debating they call the future the "seventh moment" of their creations.

Foundational Questions

This chapter, in contrast with the work of qualitative theorists and historians cited above, distinguishes theoretical perspectives by their foundational questions. A foundational or burning question, like the mythical burning bush of Moses, blazes with heat (controversy) and light (wisdom) but is not consumed (is never fully answered). Disciplines given birth by the mother of all disciplines, philosophy, can be distinguished by their core burning questions. For sociology, the burning question is the Hobbesian question of order: What holds society or social groups together? What keeps them from falling apart? Psychology asks: Why do individuals think, feel, and act as they do? Political science asks: What is the nature of power, how it is distributed, and with what consequences? Economics studies how resources are produced and distributed. Disciplines and subdisciplines reveal layers of questions. Biologists inquire into the nature and variety of life. Horticulturists ask how plants grow, while agriculturists investigate producing food, and agronomists narrow their focus still further to field crops. To be sure, reducing any complex and multifaceted discipline to a singular burning question oversimplifies. But what is gained is clarity and focus about what distinguishes one lineage of inquiry from another. It is precisely that clarity and focus I shall strive for in identifying the burning questions that distinguish major lineages of qualitative inquiry. In doing so, I shall displease those who prefer to separate paradigms from philosophies from theoretical orientations from design strategies. For example, social constructivism may be viewed as a paradigm, ethnography may be considered a research strategy, and symbolic interactionism may be examined as a theoretical framework. However, distinctions between paradigmatic, strategic, and theoretical dimensions within any particular approach are both arguable and somewhat arbitrary. Therefore, I have circumvented those distinctions by focusing on and distinguishing foundational questions as the basis for understanding and contrasting long-standing and emergent qualitative inquiry approaches.

6 Theoretical Traditions and Orientations

Ethnography

Foundational question: What is the culture of this group of people?

Ethnography, the primary method of anthropology, is the earliest distinct tradition of qualitative inquiry. The notion of culture is central to ethnography. Ethnos is the Greek word for "a people" or cultural group. The study of ethnos then, or ethnography, is "devoted to describing ways of life of human kind, ... a social scientific description of a people and the cultural basis of their peoplehood" (Vidich and Lyman 2000:38). Ethnographic inquiry takes at its central and guiding assumption that any human group of people interacting together for a period of time will evolve a culture. Culture is that collection of behavior patterns and beliefs that constitutes "standards for deciding what is, standards for deciding what can be, standards for deciding how one feels about it, standards for deciding what to do about it, and standards for deciding how to go about doing it" (Goodenough 1971:21-22). The primary method of ethnographers is participant observation in the tradition of anthropology. This means intensive fieldwork in which the investigator is immersed in the culture under study. While ethnographers share an interest in culture, there is debate about the nature of its essence (Douglas 2000) as well as several different styles of ethnography, including the classic holistic style of Benedict and Mead, the semiotic style of Boas and Geertz, and the behaviorist style of the Whitings (Sandy 1983).

Anthropologists have traditionally studied nonliterate cultures in remote settings, what were often thought of as "primitive" or "exotic" cultures. As a result, anthropology and ethnographers became intertwined with Western colonialism, sometimes resisting imperialism in efforts to sustain native cultures and sometimes as handmaides to conquering empires as their findings were used to overcome resistance to change and manage subjugated peoples.

Modern anthropologists apply ethnographic methods to the study of contemporary society and social problems, for example, technological diffusion, globalization, environmental degradation, poverty, the gap between rich and poor, and societal breakdown (Scudder 1999), education (Spindler and Hammond 2000); addiction (Agar 1986; Agar and Reisinger 1999); child labor (Kennedy 1999); intercultural understanding in schools (Jervis 1999); and international border conflicts (Hart 1999), to give but a few of many examples. The importance of understanding culture, especially in relation to change efforts of all kinds, is the cornerstone of "applied ethnography" as it has emerged in modern society (Chambers 2000). This can be seen in the ongoing reports of members of the Society for Applied Anthropology since its founding in 1941. Whyte (1984), for example, has collected a number of classic examples of ethnographic fieldwork applied to problems of industrial democracies.

Since the 1980s, understanding culture has become central in organizational studies (Morgan 1986, 1988; Pettigrew 1983) and in much organizational development work (Rai and Margulies 1985; Louis 1983), including major efforts to change an organization's culture (Schein 1985; Silverzweig and Allen 1976). Organizational ethnography has a distinguished history that can be
traced back to the influential Hawthorne electric plant study that began in 1927 (Schwartzman 1993). Ethnography has also emerged as an approach to program evaluation (Fetterman 1984, 1989) and applied educational research (Dobbert 1982). Programs develop cultures, just as organizations do. The program’s culture can be thought of as part of the program’s treatment. As such, the culture affects both program processes and outcomes. Improving a program, then, may include changing the program’s culture. An ethnographic evaluation would both facilitate and assess such change.

Ironically, perhaps, awareness of the importance of culture has found its way into popular culture and mass media to such an extent that the term shows up nearly ubiquitously as an implied explanation for all kinds of social problems and phenomena, as shown in Exhibit 3.2.

Ethnographic methods continue to develop as new approaches emerge, for example, Doing Team Ethnography (Erickson and Stull 1998), and new issues surface, for example, Ethnographic Decision Tree Modeling (Gladwin 1989) or Writing the New Ethnography (Goodall 2000). Other ethnographic methodologists continue to delve deeply into classic issues such as paradigms for thinking about ethnographic research (LeCompte and Schensul 1999), Living the Ethnographic Life (Rose 1990), Selecting Ethnographic Informants (Johnson 1990), and how to write ethnographies (Atkinson 1992) or write the methods section in ethnographic reports (Stewart 1998). The Ethnographer’s Toolkit has been published (Schensul and LeCompte 1999).

While traditionally ethnographers have used the methods of participant observation and intensive fieldwork to study everything from small groups to nation-states, what it means to “participate” or be in the “field” or even be a “group” has changed with the World Wide Web and the emergence of the virtual ethnographer—studying people connected through distributed electronic environments (Ruhleder 2000). Nevertheless, whether doing ethnography in virtual space, a nonliterate community, a multinational corporation, or an inner-city school,
what makes the approach distinct is the manner of interpreting and applying the findings from a cultural perspective (Wolcott 1980:59; Chambers 2000:852).

**Autoethnography and Evocative Forms of Inquiry**

**Foundational question:** How does my own experience of this culture connect with and offer insights about this culture, situation, event, and/or way of life?

We turn now from the earliest qualitative tradition, ethnography, to the latest and still emergent approach: autoethnography. Ethnography and autoethnography might be thought of as bookends, or opposite ends of a qualitative continuum, that frame a large number of distinct qualitative approaches to be reviewed in this chapter. By considering them one after the other throughout this chapter, it is hoped you'll get a sense of the range of issues that distinguish qualitative approaches.

Ethnography first emerged as a method for studying and understanding the other. It was fascination with “exotic otherness” that attracted Europeans to study the peoples of Africa, Asia, the South Sea Islands, and the Americas. “The life world of the ‘primitive’ was thought to be the window through which the prehistoric past could be seen, described, and understood” (Vidich and Lyman 2000:46). In the United States, for educated, White, university-based Americans the others were Blacks, American Indians, recent immigrants, working-class families, and the inner-city poor (and for that matter, anyone else not well educated, White, and university based). In recent times, when ethnography began to be used in program evaluations, the other became the program client, the student, the welfare recipient, the patient, the alcoholic, the homeless person, the victim, the perpetrator, or the recidivist.

In organizational studies, the other was the worker, the manager, the leader, the follower, and/or the board of directors. The others were observed, interviewed, described, and their culture conceptualized, analyzed, and interpreted. Capturing and being true to the perspective of those studied, what came to be called the emic perspective, or the insider’s perspective, was contrasted with the ethnographer’s perspective, the “higher” culture, or outsider’s view. The emic viewpoint of the ethnographer implied some important degree of detachment or “higher” level of conceptual analysis and abstraction. To the extent that ethnographers reported on their own experiences as participants, it was primarily methodological reporting related to how they collected data and how, or the extent to which, they maintained detachment. To “go native” was to lose perspective.

In the new postcolonial and postmodern world at the beginning of the 21st century, the relationship between the observer and the observer has been called into question at every level. Postcolonial sensibilities raise questions about imbalances of power, wealth, and privilege between ethnographers and those they would study, including critical political questions about how findings will be used. Postmodern critiques and deconstruction of classic ethnographies have raised fundamental questions about the observer and cultural background of the observer affect what is observed while the values and cultural background of the writer’s personal experiences within a culture and addressed to academic and public audiences (Wodak 2000). Exhibit 3.3 offers a list of many, but not all, of the terms that have emerged to describe variations in this general approach. Carolyn Ellis (Ellis and Bochner 2000) describes it this way:

**Varieties of Autoethnography**

David Hayano (1979) is credited with originating the term autoethnography to describe studies by anthropologists of their own cultures. In their extensive review, Ellis and Bochner (2000) focus on studying one’s own culture and oneself as part of that culture to understand and illuminate a way of life. They cite a large number of phrases that have emerged both to support this emergent frontier of qualitative inquiry and to confuse exactly what it is. In the end, they conclude, “increasingly, autoethnography has become the term of choice in describing studies and procedures that connect the personal to the cultural” (p. 740).

**Other terms include**

- Autobiographical ethnography
- Auto-observation
- Ethnographic poetry
- Creative analytic practice ethnography
- Critical autobiography
- Ethnic autobiography
- Ethnographic memoir
- Ethnobiography
- Ethnographic autobiography
- Ethnographic stories
- Evocative narratives
- Experimental ethnography
- First-person accounts
- Indigenous ethnography
- Interpretive biography
- Lived experience
- Literary ethnography
- Narrative ethnography
- Native ethnography
- Narratives of the self
- New ethnography
- Personal ethnography
- Personal experience narratives
- Personal narratives
- Postmodern ethnography
- Reflexive ethnography
- Self-ethnography
- Self-stories
- Social autobiography
- Sociopoetics

**EXHIBIT 3.3 Varieties of Autoethnography: A Partial Lexiconology**

Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and the cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, react, and resist cultural interpretations. As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition. Usually written in first-person voice, autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms—short stories, poetry, fiction,
nography is self-awareness about and expectations as a primary data source. Ellis distinguishes autoethnography from ethnography, and how personal experiences and introspection of the ethnographic and the personal: "New Age ashram located in Pennsylvania, (2000) has responded to this challenge by asserting that "embodied ethnography." Such personal writing is controversial among qualitative theorists because of its "reptant subjectivism" (Crotty 1998:48). Many social science academics object to the way it blurs the lines between social science and literary writing. One sociologist told me angrily that those who want to write creative nonfiction or poetry should find their way to the English Department of the university and leave sociology to sociologists. Richardson (2000b), in contrast, sees the integration of art, literature, and social science as precisely the point, bringing together creative and critical aspects of inquiry. She suggests that what these various new approaches and emphases share is that "they are produced of Brunei University in the United Kingdom, for example, by calling older participants "elders." Aaron Turner (2000) responded to this challenge by asserting that "embodied ethnography." But how is one to judge the quality of such nontraditional social scientific approaches? Does the writer demonstrate a depth of knowledge (if embedded) social scientific perspective? Has this perspective informed the construction of the text? 1. Substantive contribution: Does this piece contribute to our understanding of social life? Does the writer demonstrate a depth of knowledge? Emotionally? Does it generate a personal life? The point is that, for an ethnographer, the focus of the analysis, how much they keep their role as sociological scientist in the foreground, the extent to which they use the sensibility, notion of culture, at least explicitly, to guide their analysis, and how personal the writing is. At the center, however, what distinguishes autoethnography from ethnography is self-awareness about and reporting of one's own experiences and introspections as a primary data source. Ellis describes this process as follows: I start with my personal life. I pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts, and emotions. I use what I call systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall to try to understand an experience I've lived through. Then I write my experience as a story. By exploring a personal life, the focus of this text? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view? 4. Impact: Does this affect me? Emotionally? Intellectually? Does it generate new questions? Move me to write? Move me to try new research practices? Move me to action? 5. Expression of a reality: Does this text embody a fleshed out, embodied sense of lived experience? Does it seem a "true" —a credible—account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the "real"? (Richardson 2000a:254, 2000b:937) These criteria open up the possibility of new writing formats. Elliot Eisner (1996), a former president of the American Educational Research Association, has argued that a novel as a form of qualitative reporting could be a legitimate form for a doctoral dissertation in social science or education. In that vein, he has suggested that in the "new frontier in qualitative research methodol­ogy" an artistic qualitative social science contribution can be assessed by the "number and quality of the questions that the work raises" as much as by any conclusions offered (Eisner 1997:268). In this regard, eminent evaluator Ernie House (1991) reminds us that where evaluation reports are concerned, the possibility of fiction is always a subject: "Our evaluation report proved to be so readable many people became enraptured by it. Some said it read like a novel. Others said it was a novel" (p. 113). Poetry is another artistic genre that has emerged in ethnographic reporting. Glennis (1997) converted interview transcripts into poems because she found poetry better captured and communicated what her interview with an 86-year-old professor in Puerto Rico opened up and revealed. Richardson (1998) has published a number of fieldwork-based poems, reflecting his view that poetry offers a language especially well-suited "for those special, strange, even mysterious moments when bits and pieces suddenly coalesce... . When the ethnographer, away from home and in a strange cul­ture, has a heightened sense of the frailty of being human. In such a sense, poetry appears to be a way of communicating in­stances when we feel truth has shown its face" (p. 451). Trivisano (1998) included po­
autoethnographic writing is hard to do: literary nonfiction, the personal memoir, and a "performance-based project" that draws cred, and a small Montana River named Rock Creek" (p. 71). He also calls his writing techniques of fiction, I tell a story about my-phy with other evocative writing forms, genre narrative, combining autoethnog-zyin's (2000b) "Rock Creek History," which he describes as "an experimental, mixed­ple forms in a single work. Consider Den­are also leading to the integration of multi­and reporting, combining art and science,­cence of becoming Italian American.

social scientists don't write well enough carry­t of voice may be expressive, reflective,­quence of some conversations to en­tions coherent, I had to rewrite conversa­happen. And the ethical is­sues. Just wait until you've written about fam­ily members and loved ones who are part of­your story. (p. 738)

Part of the challenge in autoeth­graphic writing is finding and owning one's­the third-person passive voice of traditional ac­ademic writing with the first-person active­voice of qualitative inquiry. Autoeth­graphy increases the importance of voice­raises the stakes because an authentic voice­enhances the authenticity of the work, while­an inauthentic voice undermines it. Voice re­veals the author's identity (Ivanic 1998). The­tone of voice may be expressive, reflective,­searching, academic, or critical, as in what­Church (1995) has called the "forbidden nar­ratives" of "critical autobiography" in­social science. In voice resides Richardson's­fifth criterion for judging quality cited earlier, what she called "expression of a­rality: Does this text embody a fleshed out,­embodied sense of lived experience? Does it­seem a "true"—a credible—account of a cul­tural, social, individual, or communal sense of the 'real'?" (p. 937). These issues are being raised in a number of disciplinary genres. Historian Edmund

What is the point of a storied life? Narrative truth seeks to keep the past alive in the pres­ent. Stories show us that the meanings and sig­nificance of the past are incomplete, tentative, and revisable according to contingencies of our present life circumstances, the present from which we narrate. Doesn't this mean that the stories we tell always run the risk of dis­torting the past? Of course, it does. After all, stories rearrange, redscribe, invent, omit, and­revise. They can be wrong in numerous ways—dates, detail, substance, etc. Does this­attribute of storytelling threaten the project of personal narrative? Not at all, because a story is not a neutral attempt to mirror the facts of one's life. Life and narrative are inextricably con­nected. Life both anticipates telling and draws doubts, weaknesses, and uncertainties. But once the story was told, the final chapter of the book that contrasts alternative coming­of-age/initiation paradigms (Exhibition 1.1 in Chapter 1) emerged relatively painless. I've included as Appendix 3.1 at the end of this chapter an excerpt from the book as an example of autoethnographic writing.

Johnstone (2000) argues that "interest in the individual voice" within anthropology can be understood, at least in part, "within the context of a larger shift toward a more­phenomenological approach to language" (p. 405). Autoethnography integrates eth­nography with personal story, a specifically­autobiographical literary fiction into a stan­dard biography in order to have a point of view from which to recount his subject's life.

In my own major effort at autoeth­nographic inquiry (Patton 1999a), the strug­gle to find an authentic voice—authentic first to me, then to others who know me, and­finally to those who do not know me—turned what I thought would be a one-year effort into seven years of often painful, dis­couraging writing. And I was only writing­about a 10-day period, a Grand Canyon hike­with my son in which we explored what it­means to come of age, or be initiated into adul­thood, in modern society. My son­started and graduated from college while I­was learning how to tell the story of what we­experienced together. To make the story­work as a story and make scattered interac­tions coherent, I had to rewrite conversa­tions that took place over several days into a­single event. In dialogue, I had to reorder the­sequence of some conversations to en­hance the plot line, and I had to learn to fol­low the novelist's mantra to "show don't tell," advice particularly difficult for those of us who make our living telling. More diffi­cult still was revealing my emotions, foibles,
90  CONCEPTUAL ISSUES IN QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

Confronting a critic of autoethnography

No, Mom, I didn’t say that you’re a bad mother. I know false consciousness sounds negative, but don’t take it personal. That’s just the deconstruction chapter. In the next chapter I do reconstruction and creative synthesis. I think you’ll really resonate to the synergistic portrayal of an archetypal maternal figure in the postmodern era of conflicted roles. You just have to get into the mindset of autoethnography.

By opening this chapter with the contrast between ethnography and autoethnography, we have moved from the beginnings of qualitative methods in anthropological fieldwork more than a century ago, where the ethnographer was an outsider among exotically distinct nonliterate peoples, to the most recent manifestation of qualitative inquiry in the postmodern age of mass communications, where autoethnographers struggle to find a distinct voice by documenting their own experiences in an increasingly all-encompassing and commercialized global culture. To further sharpen contrasts in qualitative approaches, the next two sections illuminate some of the philosophical underpinnings that have informed and shaped qualitative methods, including ethnography and autoethnography, by contrasting the foundational question of reality-oriented research and evaluation (postpositivist realism) with that of postmodern constructivism and social construction.

Truth and Reality-Oriented Correspondence Theory: Positivist, Realist, and Analytic Induction Approaches

Foundational questions: What’s really going on in the real world? What can we establish with some degree of certainty? What are plausible explanations for verifiable patterns? What’s the truth, insofar as we can get at it? How can we study a phenomenon so that our findings correspond, insofar as it’s possible, to the real world?

Variety in Qualitative Inquiry
edge itself, how it comes into being and is transmitted through language. Positivism, following Auguste Comte, asserted that only verifiable claims based directly on experience could be considered genuine knowledge. Comte was especially interested in distinguishing the empirically based "positive knowledge" of experience from theology and metaphysics, which depended onfallible human reason and belief. Logical positivism, developed by the Vienna Circle in Austria and the Berlin School in Germany in the early part of the 20th century, added to the emphasis on direct experience from positivism a logic-based commitment "to theory development using a non-circular procedural language such as symbolic logic. Knowledge comes either from direct experience or indirectly from inferences from experience through the procedural language" (Shadish 1999b:64). Logical positivism subsequently came to be associated with philosophical efforts to specify basic requirements for what could be considered scientific knowledge, which included the search for universal laws through empirical verification of logically deduced hypotheses with key concepts and variables operationally defined and carefully formulated to permit replication and falsification. Thus, real knowledge (as opposed to mere beliefs) was limited to what could be logically deduced from theory, operationally measured, and empirically replicated. Such severe, narrow, and rigorous requirements turned out to severely limit what could pass for knowledge and to demand more certainty than the complex world of social phenomena could yield. Though modest in asserting what can be known with any certainty, positivists do assert that it is possible, using empirical evidence, to distinguish between more and less plausible claims, to test and choose between rival hypotheses, and to distinguish between "belief and truth" (Campbell 1999b:151, emphasis added).

Given this brief philosophical and epistemological overview, what are the practical implications for qualitative inquiry of operating within a reality-oriented perspective? It means using the language and concepts of mainstream science to design naturalistic studies, form data gathering in the field, analyze results, and judge the quality of qualitative findings. Thus, if you are a researcher or evaluator operating from a reality-oriented stance, you worry about validity, reliability, and objectivity (e.g., Pietikäinen 1997). You realize that completely value-free inquiry is impossible, but you worry about how your values and preconceptions may affect what you see, hear, and record in the field, so you wrestle with your values, try to make any biases explicit, take steps to mitigate their influence through rigorous field procedures, and discuss their possible influence in reporting findings. You may establish an "audit trail" to verify the rigor of your fieldwork and confirmability of the data collected. Objectivity, though the term has been taken by some to suggest a naive and inhumane version of vulgar positivism, is the essential basis of all good research. Without it, the only person the reader of the research might have for "truth value" and plausibility of findings; credibility, impartiality, and independence of judgment; conformability, consistency, and dependability of data; and explainable inconsistencies or instabilities (GAO 1987:53). You may even generalize case study findings, depending on the cases selected and studied, to generate or test theory (Yin 1989, 1994, 1999b); establish causality (Ragin 1987, 2000); or inform program improvement and policy decisions from patterns established and lessons learned (GAO 1987:51). In short, you incorporate the language and principles of 21st-century science into naturalistic inquiry and qualitative analysis to convey a sense that you are dedicated to getting as close as possible to what is really going on in whatever setting you are studying. Realizing that absolute objectivity of the pure positivist variety is impossible to attain, you are prepared to admit and deal with imperfections in a phenomenologically messy and methodologically imperfect world, but you still believe that objectivity is worth striving for. As Kirk and Miller (1986) assert, objectivity, though the term has been taken by some to suggest a naive and inhumane version of vulgar positivism, is the essential basis of all good research. Without it, the only person the reader of the research might have for
accepting the conclusions of the investigator would be an authoritarian respect for the person of the author. Objectivity is a simultaneous realization of as much reliability and validity as possible. Reliability is the degree to which the finding is independent of accidental circumstances of the research, and validity is the degree to which the finding is interpreted in a correct way (p. 20).

In the introduction to their widely used and influential sourcebook Qualitative Data Analysis, Miles and Huberman (1984) stated modestly: "We think of ourselves as logical positivists who recognize and try to atone modestly: "We think of ourselves as logical positivists who recognize and try to atone for the limitations of that approach. Soft-nosed logical positivists, maybe” (p. 19). They went on to explain what this means and, in so doing, provide a succinct summary of the reality-oriented approach to qualitative research:

We believe that social phenomena exist not only in the mind but also in the objective world—and that there are some lawful and reasonably stable relationships to be found among them. Given our belief in social regularities, there is a corollary: Our task is to express them as precisely as possible, attending to their range and generality and to the local and historical contingencies under which they occur.

So, unlike some schools within social phenomenology, we consider it important to evolve a set of valid and verifiable methods for capturing these social relationships and their causes. We want to interpret and explain these phenomena and have confidence that others, using the same tools, would arrive at analogous conclusions (Miles and Huberman 1984:19-20).

Ten years later, in their revised and expanded qualitative sourcebook, Miles and Huberman called themselves "realists" rather than logical positivists, further evidence that "the weight of criticisms against logical positivism has "caused its internal collapse" (Swedberg 2001:150). Realism as a qualitative stance is clearly reality oriented, and much of the language quoted above remains in the revised edition. They acknowledge that knowledge is socially and historically constructed, and they "affirm the existence and importance of the subjective, the phenomenological, the meaning-making at the center of life." Then they return to their core reality-oriented stance:

Our aim is to register and "transcend" these processes by building theories to account for a real world that is both bounded and perceptually limited, and to test these theories in our various disciplines. Our tests do not use "covering laws" or the inductive logic of classical positivism. Rather, our explanations flow from an account of how differing structures produced the events we observed. We aim to account for events, rather than simply to document their sequence. We look for an individual or a social process, a mechanism, a structure at the core of events that can be captured to provide a causal description of the forces at work. Transcendental realism calls both for causal explanation and for the evidence to show that each entity or event is an instance of causal structures and mechanisms that can be captured to provide a causal description of the forces at work.

Throughout this section, I have used the term reality-oriented qualitative inquiry to describe this perspective because labels such as logical positivism, postpositivism, logical empiricism, realism, transcendental realism, and objectivism are jargonish, have disputed definitions, and carry negative connotations for many, so they come with lots of baggage. I have attempted to be descriptive about the reality-oriented, correspondence theory perspective by focusing on its core, foundational questions as articulated at the beginning of this section. While, as the next section will show, many qualitative methodologies assert that qualitative inquiry is inherently constructionist or phenomenological in perspective, the reality-oriented perspective remains widespread, even dominant, in those arenas of research practice where scientific credibility carries a premium. These arenas include many dissertation committees in traditional disciplines where qualitative dissertations are just beginning to be allowed, in summative evaluation and policy studies where mere "anecdotal" evidence is demanded, and in fields such as medical research where double-blind experimental studies remain the gold standard. To emphasize this latter point, I close this review of reality-oriented qualitative inquiry with an excerpt from a medical journal in which health researchers are defending qualitative research to an audience known to be skeptical. Their approach is to associate qualitative research closely with accepted and credible forms of experimental research. Such a perspective epitomizes the reality-testing orientation:

What, then, does the qualitative researcher do once he or she accomplishes a careful and trustworthy understanding of the language and behavior of an individual human being? Here is where we rely on our positivist skills and methods. . . . Once we carefully examine and articulate that which we understand about human beings to be doing, we attempt to col- late the language and behavior of many hu-
man beings, so many that we might be able to test the relationships, for example, between setting and behavior or between age and hope. Included within the domains of qualitative science or narrative research, then, are efforts to generalize, to predict, and to relate initial states to outcomes. These efforts require the same evidence-based activities that are used in testing any hypothesis. (Charon, Greene, and Adelman 1998:6)

Social Construction and Constructivism

Foundational Questions: How have the people in this setting constructed reality? What are their explanations, beliefs, and worldviews? What are the consequences of their constructions for their behaviors and for those with whom they interact?

Constructivism begins with the premise that the human world is different from the natural, physical world and therefore must be studied differently (Guba and Lincoln 1989). Because human beings have evolved the capacity to interpret and construct reality—indeed, they cannot do otherwise—the world of human perception is not real in an absolute sense, as the sun is real, but is "made up" and shaped by cultural and linguistic constructs. To say that the socially constructed world of human beings is not physically real like the sun doesn't mean that it isn't perceived and experienced as real by human beings, so many that we might be able to test the relationships, for example, between setting and behavior or between age and hope. Included within the domains of qualitative science or narrative research, then, are efforts to generalize, to predict, and to relate initial states to outcomes. These efforts require the same evidence-based activities that are used in testing any hypothesis. (Charon, Greene, and Adelman 1998:6)

Constructivism begins with the premise that the human world is different from the natural, physical world and therefore must be studied differently (Guba and Lincoln 1989). Because human beings have evolved the capacity to interpret and construct reality—indeed, they cannot do otherwise—the world of human perception is not real in an absolute sense, as the sun is real, but is "made up" and shaped by cultural and linguistic constructs. To say that the socially constructed world of human beings is not physically real like the sun doesn't mean that it isn't perceived and experienced as real by human beings, so many that we might be able to test the relationships, for example, between setting and behavior or between age and hope. Included within the domains of qualitative science or narrative research, then, are efforts to generalize, to predict, and to relate initial states to outcomes. These efforts require the same evidence-based activities that are used in testing any hypothesis. (Charon, Greene, and Adelman 1998:6)

Constructivism begins with the premise that the human world is different from the natural, physical world and therefore must be studied differently (Guba and Lincoln 1989). Because human beings have evolved the capacity to interpret and construct reality—indeed, they cannot do otherwise—the world of human perception is not real in an absolute sense, as the sun is real, but is "made up" and shaped by cultural and linguistic constructs. To say that the socially constructed world of human beings is not physically real like the sun doesn't mean that it isn't perceived and experienced as real by human beings, so many that we might be able to test the relationships, for example, between setting and behavior or between age and hope. Included within the domains of qualitative science or narrative research, then, are efforts to generalize, to predict, and to relate initial states to outcomes. These efforts require the same evidence-based activities that are used in testing any hypothesis. (Charon, Greene, and Adelman 1998:6)

Constructivism begins with the premise that the human world is different from the natural, physical world and therefore must be studied differently (Guba and Lincoln 1989). Because human beings have evolved the capacity to interpret and construct reality—indeed, they cannot do otherwise—the world of human perception is not real in an absolute sense, as the sun is real, but is "made up" and shaped by cultural and linguistic constructs. To say that the socially constructed world of human beings is not physically real like the sun doesn't mean that it isn't perceived and experienced as real by human beings, so many that we might be able to test the relationships, for example, between setting and behavior or between age and hope. Included within the domains of qualitative science or narrative research, then, are efforts to generalize, to predict, and to relate initial states to outcomes. These efforts require the same evidence-based activities that are used in testing any hypothesis. (Charon, Greene, and Adelman 1998:6)
with and perceptions of the program, all of which deserve attention and all of which are experienced as real. The constructionist evaluator would attempt to capture these different perspectives through open-ended interviews and observations, and then would examine the implications of different perceptions (or multiple "realities") but would not pronounce which set of perceptions was "right" or more "true" or more "valid," as would a reality-oriented (post-positivist) evaluator. Constructionist evaluators could compare clients' perceptions and social constructions with those of funders or program staff and could interpret the effects of differences on attainment of stated program goals, but they would not value those perceptions as more real or meaningful. In constructionist evaluation, then, "the claims, concerns, and issues of stakeholders serve as organizational foci (the basis for determining what information is needed)" (Guba and Lincoln 1989:50).

Indeed, if constructionist evaluators were also operating from a social justice framework, they might give added weight to the perspectives of those with less power and privilege in order to "give voice" to the disenfranchised, the underprivileged, the poor, and others outside the mainstream (Weiss and Greene 1992:145). In the evaluation of a diversity project in a school district in Saint Paul, Minnesota, a major part of the design included capturing and reporting the experiences of people of color. Providing a way for African American, Native American, Chicano-Latino, and Hmong parents to tell their stories to mostly White, corporate funders was an intentional part of the design; they represent simply another construct, not of correspondence with objective reality.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) included among the primary assumptions of constructivism the following, whether for evaluation or research more generally:

- "Truth" is a matter of consensus among informed and sophisticated constructors, not of correspondence with objective reality.
- "Facts" have no meaning except within some value framework, hence there cannot be an "objective" assessment of any proposition.
- "Causes" and effects do not exist except by imputation.
- Phenomena can only be understood within the context in which they are studied; findings from one context cannot be generalized to another; neither problems nor solutions can be generalized from one setting to another; ... Data derived from constructivist inquiry have neither special status nor legitimization; they represent simply another construction to be taken into account in the move toward consensus. (pp. 44-45)

Guba and Lincoln (1990:148) summarize the constructionist perspective as being ontologically relativist, epistemologically subjectivist, and methodologically hermeneutic and dialectic. The thread throughout is the emphasis on the socially constructed nature of reality as distinguishing the study of human beings from the study of other natural phenomena.

The idea that social groups such as street gangs or religious adherents construct their own realities has a long history in sociology, especially the sociology of knowledge (e.g., Berger and Luckmann 1967). It wasn't until this idea of socially constructed knowledge was applied to scientists that constructivism became an influential methodological paradigm. No work has been more influential in that regard than Thomas Kuhn's classic The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1970). Before Kuhn, most people thought that science progressed through heroic individual discoveries that contributed to an accumulating body of knowledge that got closer and closer to the way the world really worked. In contrast, Kuhn argued that tightly organized communities of specialists were the central forces in scientific development. Ideas that seemed to derive from brilliant individual scientific minds were actually shaped by and dependent on paradigms of knowledge that were socially constructed and enforced through group consensus. Rather than seeing scientific inquiry as progressing steadily toward truth about nature, he suggested that science is best seen as a series of power struggles between adherents of different scientific worldviews.

Kuhn emphasized the power of preconceived and socially constructed ideas to control the observations of scientists. He insisted that, without the focusing effect of agreed-on constructs, investigators would not be able actually to engage in research. A fully "open" mind would not be able to focus on the details necessary to engage in "normal" science, that is, testing specific propositions derived from a theory or "scientific paradigm." What made this contribution so important was the widespread perception that scientists, rather than being bound by preconceptions, were open-minded, value free, and unencumbered by inherited ideas. Kuhn applied to science the kind of language normally used to describe confrontations between opposing political and ideological communities, especially during revolutions. He argued (and showed with natural science examples) that communities of scientists, like ideological or religious communities, were organized by certain traditions that periodically came under strain when new problems arose that couldn't be explained by old beliefs. New explanations and ideas would then compete until the old ideas were discarded or revised, sometimes sweeping. But the competition was not just intellectual. Power was involved. The leaders of scientific communities wielded power in support of their positions just as political leaders do. The assessment of Kuhn's contribution, three decades after his work first appeared, by Berkeley historian David Hollinger shows the importance of his analysis: "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions presented the strongest case ever made for the dependence of valid science on distinctly constituted, historically particular human communities" (Hollinger 2000:23).

Scientists constitute a critical case for social constructionism. If scientific knowledge is socially constructed and consequently validated, as opposed to consisting of empirical truths validated by nature, then surely all knowledge is socially constructed. "Accordingly, not only the social scientist but equally the natural scientist has to deal with realities that, as meaningful realities, are socially constructed. They are on equal footing in this respect" (Crotty 1998:55).

Kuhn's analysis, though remaining controversial and heavily criticized (e.g., Fuller 2000), became a cornerstone of the postmodern skepticism about scientific truth.
Postmodernism, Radavich (2001) asserts, has become "the most prevalent mode of thinking in our time... Postmodern discourse is precisely the discourse that denies the possibility of ontological grounding" (p. 6). In other words, no truth or "true meaning," about any aspect of existence is possible, at least not in any absolute sense; it can only be constructed. To understand constructionism and its implications for qualitative inquiry, a brief review of postmodernism may be helpful in that it has shaped contemporary intellectual discourse in both science and art.

Belief in science as generating truth was one of the cornerstones of modernism inherited from the Enlightenment. Postmodernism attacked this faith in science by questioning its capacity to generate truth, in part because, like all human communications, it is dependent on language, which is socially constructed and, as such, distorts reality. Postmodernism asserts that no language, not even that of science, can provide a direct window through which one can view reality. Language inevitably and inherently is built on the assumptions and worldview of the social group that has constructed it and the culture of which it is a part. Thus, language does not and cannot fully capture or represent reality; a posture called the "crisis of representation" (Denzin and Lincoln 2000b; Turner 1998:598). Translated into Kuhn's terms, because, like all human communications, it is a social group that has constructed it and the culture of which it is a part, language creates a screen between human beings and physical reality. "Vocabularies are useful or useless, good or bad, helpful or misleading, sensitive or coarse, and so on; but they are not 'more objective' or 'less objective' nor more or less 'scientific' " (Rorty 1994:57). This is because discovering the "true nature of reality" is not the real purpose of language; the purpose of language is to communicate the social construction of the dominant members of the group using the language.

The postmodern perspective, and its many variations—for postmodernism is not a unitary perspective (e.g., Pillow 2000; Constas 1998)—has given rise to an emphasis on deconstruction, which means to take apart the language of a text to expose its critical assumptions and the ideological interests being served. Perspective and power occur as hand in glove in postmodern critiques. Social constructions are presumed to serve someone's interests, usually those of the powerful. As Denzin (1991) has asserted with reference to deconstructing mass media messages, a critical analysis should "give a voice to the voiceless, as it deconstructs those popular culture texts which reproduce stereotypes about the powerless" (p. 153). Thus, deconstruction constitutes a core analytical tool of constructivists. In deconstructing constructionism and constructivism, one finds a range of assumptions and positions, from the radical "absolutely no reality ever" to a milder "let's capture and honor different perspectives about reality." These positions share an interest in the subjective nature of human perceptions and skepticism about the possibility of objectivity. Reality-oriented researchers, in kind, are skeptical of the subjective knowledge of constructivism. How contentious is the debate? One gets some sense of the gulf that can separate these views from an assessment of postmodernism and constructivism by Rutgers mathematician Norman Leyt 1998) in an article titled "Why Professors Believe Weird Things": "Scientific evidence—which is to say the only meaningful evidence—cannot be neutralized by 'subjective knowledge,' which is the way to say bullshit" (p. 34). He goes on to comment on constructivism as a particular manifestation of postmodernism: "a particular technique for getting drunk on one's own words" (p. 35).

Thomas Schwandt (1974a) in his very useful dictionary of qualitative terms strikes a more conciliatory tone, recognizing that the rhetoric of constructivism can sound radical (and silly) if taken too literally:

Although some versions of constructivism do appear to deny reality, many (if not most, I suspect) qualitative investigators have a common-sense realist ontology, that is, they take seriously the existence of things, events, structures, people, meanings, and so forth in the environment as independent in some way from their experience with them. And they regard society, institutions, feelings, intelligence, poverty, disability, and so on as being just as "real" as the toes on their feet and the sun in the sky (p. 134).

Further deconstructing the phrase "social construction," one might find "inescapable connotations of manufacturing," as if people sat around and made things up. But
to say that people produce the world is not the same as saying that they are solipsists, that they are able to fashion the world according to their whims. . . . One cannot ordinarily produce an imaginary or nonsensical phenomenon and expect to be taken seriously. The mistake is to think of the process of production as one that is free of constraints when in fact it is a structure of constraints. (Watson and Goulet 1998:97)

Attending to the social construction of reality, then, points us not only to what is constructed but to how it is constructed and the very question of what it means to say it is constructed. For an excellent review of these issues in both the social and natural sciences, see Hacking (2000).

DUALIST AND MONIST CONSTRUCTIONISM

Distinguishing dualist from monist approaches to social constructionism takes the deconstruction process through one final filter.

Dualist constructionism distinguishes between actual states of affairs and perceptions, interpretations, or reactions to those affairs. . . . When Berger and Luckmann (1967) say that the Sociology of Knowledge "must concern itself with whatever passes for 'knowledge' in a society" (p. 3), their putting knowledge in quotation marks demonstrates a commitment to a dualist position. There is knowledge then there is "knowledge." The latter will be treated as knowledge by some social group, but judgment can be made on the ultimate validity of this group's claims, determining whether "knowledge" really is knowledge . . .

If the approach to the domain of inquiry is dualist this means that the analyst distinguishes between the objective features of the domain and members' representations of those features. The dualist is prepared to judge the adequacy of the members' representations (beliefs, interpretation). If the approach to the domain is monist, then there are only members' representations, the adequacy of which cannot be raised as an issue; there are no objective features in the domain upon which to base a judgment of the adequacy, for example, of a claim of racism. There are only representations of features, for example, the representation/claim of racism. (Heap 1995:54)

We can conclude by emphasizing the basic contributions of social construction and constructivist perspectives to qualitative inquiry, namely, the emphasis on capturing and honoring multiple perspectives; attending to the ways in which language as a social and cultural construction shapes, distorts, and structures understandings; how methods determine findings; and the importance of thinking about the relationship between the investigator and the investigated, especially the effects of inequitable power dynamics—and how that relationship affects what is found.
Phenomenology

**Foundational questions:**
What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?

“Phenomenology asks for the very nature of a phenomenon, for that which makes a some ‘thing’ what it is—and without which it could not be what it is” (Van Manen 1990:10). The initial clarity of this definition can fade rapidly because the term phenomenology has become so popular and has been so widely embraced that its meaning has become confused and diluted. It can refer to a philosophy (Husserl 1967), an inquiry paradigm (Lincoln 1990), an interpretive theory (Denzin and Lincoln 2000b:14), a social science analytical perspective or orientation (Harper 2000:727; Schutz 1967, 1970), a major qualitative tradition (Creswell 1998), or a research methods framework (Moustakas 1994). Varying forms complicate the picture even more; transcendental, existential, and hermeneutic phenomenology offer different nuances of focus—the essential meanings of individual experience, the social construction of group reality, and the language and structure of communication, respectively (Schwandt 2001:191-94). Phenomenological traditions in sociology and psychology vary in unit of analysis, group or individual (Creswell 1998:53). Adding further confusion to the mix, the term phenomenography was coined by Ulrich Sonnemann (1954) to emphasize “a descriptive recording of immediate subjective experience as reported” (p. 344). (For an annotated bibliography of phenomenographic research, see Bruce and Gheren 1997.)

What these various phenomenological and phenomenographic approaches share in common is a focus on exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning. This requires methodologically, carefully, and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon—how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others. To gather such data, one must undertake in-depth interviews with people who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest; that is, they have “lived experience” as opposed to secondhand experience.

Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences. . . . Anything that presents itself to consciousness is potentially of interest to phenomenology; whether the object is real or imagined, empirically measurable or subjectively felt. Consciousness is the only access human beings have to the world. Or rather, it is by virtue of being conscious that we are already related to the world. Thus all we can ever know must present itself to consciousness. Whatever falls outside of consciousness therefore falls outside the bounds of our possible lived experience. . . . A person cannot reflect on lived experience while living through the experience. For example, if one tries to reflect on one’s anger while being angry, one finds that the anger has already changed or dissipated. Thus, phenomenological reflection is not retrospective but retrospective. Reflection on lived experience is always retrospective; it is reflection on experience that is already passed or lived through (Van Manen 1990:9-10).

The phenomenon that is the focus of inquiry may be an emotion—loneliness, jealousy, anger. The phenomenon may be a relationship, a marriage, or a job. The phenomenon may be a program, an organization, or a culture.

Phenomenology as a philosophical tradition was first used in the development of a rigorous science by the German philosopher Edmund H. Husserl (1859-1938). The work of Alfred Schutz (1889-1952) was an important influence in applying and establishing phenomenology as a major social science perspective (Schutz 1977). Other important influences have been Merleau-Ponty (1962), Whitehead (1958), Giorgi (1971), and Zaner (1970). More recently, phenomenology has become an important influence in certain approaches to psychotherapy (Moustakas 1988, 1995).

By phenomenology Husserl (1913) meant the study of how people describe things and experience them through their senses. His most basic philosophical assumption was that we can only know what we experience by attending to perceptions and meanings that
awaken our conscious awareness. Initially, all our understanding comes from sensory experience. The essence of phenomena, but that experience must be described, explicated, and interpreted. Yet, descriptions of experience and interpretations are so intertwined that they often become one. Interpretation is essential to an understanding of experience and the experience includes the interpretation. Thus, phenomenologists focus on how we put together the phenomena we experience in such a way as to make sense of the world and, in so doing, develop a personal view. There is no separate (or objective) reality for people. There is only what they know their experience is and means. The subjective experience incorporates the objective thing and becomes a person’s reality, thus the focus on meaning making as the essence of human experience.

From a phenomenological point of view, we are less interested in the factual status of particular instances: whether something happened, how often it tends to happen, or how the occurrence of an experience is related to the presence of other conditions or events. For example, phenomenology does not ask, “How do these children learn this particular material?” but it asks, “What is the nature or essence of the experience of learning (so that I can more better understand what this particular learning experience is like for these children)?” (Van Manen 1990:10).

There are two implications of this perspective that are often confused in discussing qualitative methods. The first implication is methodological. The second implication is philosophical basis of phenomenology, yet it is often misunderstood. On the other hand, each person has a unique set of experiences which are treated as truth and which determine that individual’s behavior. In this sense, truth and individual behavior is totally unique to each individual. Some researchers are misled to think that they are using a phenomenological perspective when they study four teachers and describe their four unique views. A phenomenologist assumes a commonality in these human experiences and must use rigorously the method of bracketing to search for these commonalities. Results obtained from a phenomenological study can then be related to and integrated with those of other phenomenologists studying the same experience, or phenomenon. (Eichelberger 1990:40)

In short, conducting a study with a phenomenological focus (i.e., getting at the essence of the experience of some phenomenon) is different from using phenomenology to philosophically justify the methods of qualitative inquiry as legitimate in social science research. Both contributions are important, but a phenomenological study (as opposed to a philosophical perspective) is one that focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience. One can employ a general phenomenological perspective to elucidate the importance of using methods that capture people’s experience of the world without conducting a phenomenological study that focuses on the essence of shared experience (at least that is my experience and interpretation of the phenomenon of phenomenology).

Heuristic Inquiry

Foundational question: What is my experience of this phenomenon and the essential experience of others who also experience this phenomenon intensely?

Heuristics is a form of phenomenological inquiry that brings to the fore the personal experience and insights of the researcher. “Heuristic” research came into my life when I was searching for a word that would meaningfully encompass the processes that I believed to be essential in investigations of human experience. The root meaning of heuristic comes from the Greek word heuriskein, meaning to discover or to find. It refers to a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge. Heuristic processes incorporate creative self-processes and self-discoveries.

There are two focusing or narrowing elements of heuristic inquiry within the larger framework of phenomenology. First, the researcher must have personal experience with and intense interest in the phenomenon under study. Second, others (coresearchers) who are part of the study must share an intensity of experience with the phenomenon. Heuristics is not inquiry into casual experience. Heuristic inquiry focuses on intense human experiences, intense from the point of view of the investigator and coresearchers. It is the combination of personal experience and intensity that yields an understanding of the essence of the phenomenon. “Heuristics is concerned with meanings, not measurements; with essence, not appearance; with quality, not quantity; with experience, not behavior” (Douglas and Mosotkas 1985:42).

The reports of heuristic researchers are filled with the discoveries, personal insights, and reflections of the researchers. Discovery comes from being wide open to the thing itself, a recognition that one must relinquish control and be tumbled about with the newness and drama of a searching focus, “asking questions about phenomena...
that disturb and challenge" (Douglass and Moustakas 1985:47).

The uniqueness of heuristic inquiry is the extent to which it legitimizes and places at the forefront personal experiences, reflections, and insights of the researcher. The researcher, then, comes to understand the essence of the phenomenon through shared reflection and inquiry with coresearchers as they also intensively experience and reflect on the phenomenon in question. A sense of connectedness develops between researcher and research participants in their mutual efforts to elucidate the nature, meaning, and essence of a significant human experience.


The power of heuristic inquiry lies in its potential for disclosing truth. Through exhaustive self-search, dialogues with others, and creative depictions of experience, a comprehensive knowledge is generated, beginning as a series of subjective and developing into a systematic and definitive exposition. (Douglass and Moustakas 1985:40)

Heuristic inquiry is derived from but different from phenomenology in four major ways (Douglass and Moustakas 1985):

1. Heuristics emphasizes connectedness and relationship, while phenomenology encourages more detachment in analyzing an experience.
2. Heuristics leads to "deceptions of essential meanings and portrayal of the intricate and personal significance that imbue the search to know," while phenomenology emphasizes definitive descriptions of the structures of experience.
3. Heuristics concludes with a "creative synthesis" that includes the researcher's intuition and tacit understandings, while phenomenology presents a distillation of the structures of experience.
4. "Whereas phenomenology loses the person in the process of descriptive analysis, in heuristics the research participants remain visible in the examination of the data and continue to be portrayed as whole persons. Phenomenology ends with the essence of experience; heuristics retains the essence of the person in experience" (p. 43).

Systematic steps in the heuristic inquiry process lead to the "definitive exposition" of experiential essence: immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis (Moustakas 1990a).

Qualitative Heuristics: A German Alternative Tradition

Since no authority exists to monitor and sort out nomenclature, conflicts in usage occur, contributing to confusion and the importance of reaffirming the admonition to always define one's terms. Heuristic inquiry, à la Clark Moustakas and discussed in the previous section, has a nomenclature rival in "qualitative heuristics," an approach developed at the University of Hamburg, Germany, which aims to "bring back the qualities of systematic exploration and discovery into psychological and sociological research" (Klinge and Witt 2000:1). It is based on four rules.

Rule 1. The research person should be open to new concepts and change his or her preconceptions if the data are not in agreement with them.

Rule 2. The topic of research is preliminary and may change during the research process. It is only fully known after being successfully explored.

Rule 3. Data should be collected under the paradigm of maximum structural variation of perspectives. Variation of the sample and of research methods avoids one-sidedness of representation of the topic; variation of questions avoids just one answer. If researchers assume that a variable may influence the data they should implement variations. Structural variations mean sampling of positions in reference to the topic, i.e., when studying an emotion, the collection of data past and present, before and after its occurrence, in different situations, from different respondents, if possible.
from different times and cultures, by different methods, etc.

Rule 4. The analysis is directed toward discovery of similarities. It locates similarities, analogies or homologies within these most diverse and varied data. It tries to overcome differences. The rule follows Simmel's famous chapter on method saying that "out of complex phenomena the homogeneous will be extracted and the dissimilar paralyzed." (Kleining and Witt 2000:online)

This approach emphasizes "introspection" as a critical part of the analytical process. An element also central to "heuristic inquiry" in the tradition of humanistic psychology. However, neither heuristic inquiry as articulated by Moustakas (1990) nor this German alternative labeled "qualitative heuristics" can be derived directly from the common dictionary definition of heuristics, defined as techniques to assist learning or techniques for exploratory problem solving—though neither approach conflicts explicitly with the dictionary definition. Those who lament such variations in meanings, denotations, and connotations may find some comfort in Ambrose Bierce's definition of lexicographer:

A pestilent fellow who, under the pretense of recording some particular stage in the development of a language, does what he can to arrest its growth, stifle its flexibility and mechanize its methods. For your lexicographer, having written his dictionary, comes to be considered "as one having authority," whereas his function is only to make a record, not to give a law. Recognizing the truth that language must grow by innovation if it grow at all, makes new words and uses the old in an unfamiliar sense, has no following and is tartly reminded that "it isn't in the dictionary"—although down to the time of the first lexicographer (Heaven forgive him!) no author ever had used a word that was in the dictionary. In the golden prime and high noon of English speech, when from the lips of the great Elizabethans fell words that made their own meaning and carried it in their very sound; when a Shakespeare and a Bacon were possible, and the language now rapidly perishing at one and slowly renewed at the other was in vigorous growth and hardy preservation—sweeter than honey and stronger than a lion—the lexicographer was a person unknown, the dictionary a creation which his Creator had not created him to create. (p. 110)

Ethnomethodology

Foundational questions:

How do people make sense of their everyday activities so as to behave in socially acceptable ways?

Where heuristic inquiry focuses on issues of intense personal interest, ethnomethodology focuses on the ordinary, the routine, the details of everyday life. Harold Garfinkel (1967) invented the term. While working with the Yale cross-cultural files, Garfinkel came across such labels as "ethnobotany," "ethnophysiology," and "ethrophonics." At the time he was studying jurors. He decided that the deliberation methods of the jurors, or for that matter of any group, constituted an "ethnomethodology" wherein ethos refers to the "availability to a member of common-sense knowledge of his society as common-sense knowledge of the 'whatever.'" (Turner 1974:16). For the jurors this was their ordinary, everyday understanding of what it meant to deliberate as a juror. Such an understanding made jury duty possible.

Ethnomethodology studies the social order by "combining a phenomenological sensibility with a paramount concern for everyday social practice" (Gubrium and Holstein 2000:490). Wallace and Wolf (1980) defined ethnomethodology as follows: "If we translated the 'ethnos' part of the term as 'members' (of a group) or 'folk' or 'people,' then the term's meaning can be stated as: members' methods of making sense of their social world." (p. 263). Ethnomethodology gets to the norms, understandings, and assumptions that are taken for granted by people in a setting because they are so deeply understood: that people don't even think about why they do what they do. It studies "the ordinary methods that ordinary people use to realize their ordinary actions" (Coulter 1995:2). Rooted in phenomenology, ethnomethodology has been particularly important in sociology.

Ethnomethodology is, as the name suggests, a study of methods. It asks not why, but how. It asks how people get things done—how they transform situations or how they persevere, situation "unchanged," step by step, and moment to moment. As its name also suggests, it is interested in ordinary methods, the methods of the people rather than their theorists. (Watson and Goulet 1998:97)

Ethnomethodologists attempt to make explicit what might be called the group's 'tacit knowledge,' to extend Polanyi's (1967) idea of tacit knowledge from the individual to the group. Heuristic inquiry reveals tacit knowledge through introspection and intersubjective inquiry with counterparts. Ethnomethodologists get at a group's tacit knowledge by forcing it to the surface through disrupting violations of ordinary experience, since ordinary routines are seen as keeping tacit knowledge at an unconscious, tacit level. In short, ethnomethodologists "bracket or suspend their own belief in reality to study the reality of everyday life" (Taylor and Bogdan 1984:11). Elucidating the taken-for-granted realities of everyday life in a program or organization can become a force for understanding, change, and establishing a new reality based on the kind of ev-

ing something out of the ordinary. A very simple and well-known such experiment is turning to face the other people on an elevator instead of facing the doors. When they conduct such qualitative experiments, "the researchers are interested in what the subjects do and what they look to in order to give the situation an appearance of order, or to 'make sense' of the situation" (Wallace and Wolf 1980:278). Garfinkel (1967) offered a number of such experiments (see especially pp. 38, 42, 47, 79, and 85). Ethnomethodologists also have special interests in observing naturally occurring experiments where people are thrust into new or unexpected situations that require them to make sense of what is happening—"situations in which meaning is problematic" (Wallace and Wolf 1980:280). Such situations include intake into a program, immigration clearance centers, the first few weeks in a new school or job, and major transition points or critical incidents in the lives of people, programs, and organizations.

In some respects, ethnomethodologists attempt to make explicit what might be called the group's 'tacit knowledge,' to extend Polanyi's (1967) idea of tacit knowledge from the individual to the group. Heuristic inquiry reveals tacit knowledge through introspection and intersubjective inquiry with counterparts. Ethnomethodologists get at a group's tacit knowledge by forcing it to the surface through disrupting violations of ordinary experience, since ordinary routines are seen as keeping tacit knowledge at an unconscious, tacit level. In short, ethnomethodologists "bracket or suspend their own belief in reality to study the reality of everyday life" (Taylor and Bogdan 1984:11). Elucidating the taken-for-granted realities of everyday life in a program or organization can become a force for understanding, change, and establishing a new reality based on the kind of ev-

ing something out of the ordinary. A very simple and well-known such experiment is turning to face the other people on an elevator instead of facing the doors. When they conduct such qualitative experiments, "the researchers are interested in what the subjects do and what they look to in order to give the situation an appearance of order, or to 'make sense' of the situation" (Wallace and Wolf 1980:278). Garfinkel (1967) offered a number of such experiments (see especially pp. 38, 42, 47, 79, and 85). Ethnomethodologists also have special interests in observing naturally occurring experiments where people are thrust into new or unexpected situations that require them to make sense of what is happening—"situations in which meaning is problematic" (Wallace and Wolf 1980:280). Such situations include intake into a program, immigration clearance centers, the first few weeks in a new school or job, and major transition points or critical incidents in the lives of people, programs, and organizations.

In some respects, ethnomethodologists attempt to make explicit what might be called the group's 'tacit knowledge,' to extend Polanyi's (1967) idea of tacit knowledge from the individual to the group. Heuristic inquiry reveals tacit knowledge through introspection and intersubjective inquiry with counterparts. Ethnomethodologists get at a group's tacit knowledge by forcing it to the surface through disrupting violations of ordinary experience, since ordinary routines are seen as keeping tacit knowledge at an unconscious, tacit level. In short, ethnomethodologists "bracket or suspend their own belief in reality to study the reality of everyday life" (Taylor and Bogdan 1984:11). Elucidating the taken-for-granted realities of everyday life in a program or organization can become a force for understanding, change, and establishing a new reality based on the kind of ev-
Inquiry as the only real way of understanding how people perceive, understand, and interpret the world. Only through close contact and direct interaction with people in open-minded, naturalistic inquiry and inductive analysis could the symbolic interactionist come to understand the symbolic world of the people being studied. Blumer was also one of the first to use group discussion and interview methods with key informants. He considered a carefully selected group of naturally acute observers and well-informed people to be a real "panel of experts" about a setting or situation, experts who would take the researcher inside the phenomenon of interest, for example, doing on-line interaction both bodies and selves are fluid symbolic constructs emergent in communication and are defined by sociocultural standards. Situations such as these are suggestive of issues related to contemporary transgressions of the empirical shell of the body, potentially reshaping body-to-self-to-social-world relationships. (p. 375)

For our purposes, the importance of symbolic interactionism to qualitative inquiry is its distinct emphasis on the importance of symbols and the interpretative processes that undergird interactions as fundamental to understanding human behavior. For program evaluation, organizational development, and other applied research, the study of the original meaning and influence of symbols and shared meanings can shed light on what is most important to people, what will be most resistant to change, and what will be most necessary to change if the program or organization is to move in new directions. The subject matter and methods of symbol interactionism also emphasize the importance of paying attention to how particular interactions give rise to symbolic understandings when one is engaged in changing symbols as part of a program improvement or organizational development process.

A related theoretical tradition informing some qualitative inquiry is semiotics, a blend of linguistics and social science, which focuses on analysis of signs by studying the rules or forms of language as well as the relationship between language and human behavior (Manning 1987). "The importance of a study of language, as opposed to a scientific study of a space-time event like a solar eclipse or rat behavior," Walker Percy (1990:150) has explained, "is that as soon as one scratches the surface of the familiar and comes face to face with the nature of language," one also finds oneself face to face with the nature and essence of being human. This is so because semiotics, in working to "unite logical analysis with the explanatory enterprise of science" (p. 243), has hit upon the fruitful insight that humans are distinctively sign-using and symbol-generating animals. Thus, semiotics offers a framework for "analyzing talk and text" (Silverman 2000:826) or studying "organizational symbolism" (Jones 1996). The foundational question of semiotics is: How do signs (words, symbols) carry and convey meaning in particular contexts?

Hermeneutics

Foundational questions:

What are the conditions under which a human act took place or a product was produced that make it possible to interpret its meanings?

In this brief (or not-so-brief, depending on your perspective) excursion through the variety of qualitative inquiry, we depart now from phenomenology and its derivative approaches: hermeneutic research, ethnomethodology, and symbolic interactionism. Hermeneutics is yet a different theoretical approach that can inform qualitative inquiry and also help put all the other theoretical orientations in this chapter in perspective in that it reminds us that what something means depends on the cultural context in which it was originally created as well as the cultural context within which it is subsequently interpreted. This is a reminder that
each of the theoretical perspectives presented in this chapter emerged from a particular context to address specific concerns at that time. As we adopt and adapt those perspectives to current inquiries, we do so in a different historical, scholarly, and cultural context.

Hermeneutic philosophy, first developed by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and applied to human science research by Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) and other German philosophers, focuses on the problem of interpretation. Hermeneutics provides a theoretical framework for interpretive understanding, or meaning, with special attention to context and original purpose. The term *hermeneutics* derives from the Greek word *hermeneuein*, meaning to understand or interpret.

There is an obvious link between *hermeneuetics* and the god Hermes. Hermes is the fleet-footed divine messenger (he has wings on his feet). As a messenger, he is the bearer of knowledge and understanding. His task is to explain to humans the decisions of the gods. Whether Hermes derives from Hermes or the other way round is not certain. (Croty 1998:88)

In modern usage, hermeneutics offers a perspective for interpreting legends, stories, and other texts, especially biblical and legal texts. To make sense of and interpret a text, it is important to know what the author wanted to communicate, to understand intended meanings, and to place documents in a historical and cultural context (Palmer 1969). Following that principle, hermeneutics itself must be understood as part of a 19th- and 20th-century "broad movement away from empiricism, logical atomism, descriptive, representational account of meaning and knowledge... Logical empiricism worked from a conception of knowledge as correct representation of an independent reality and was (is) almost exclusively interested in the issue of establishing the validity of scientific knowledge claims" (Schwandt 2000:196). In other words, hermeneutics challenged the assertion that an interpretation can ever be absolutely correct or true. It must remain only and always an interpretation.

The meaning of a text, then, is negotiated among a contiguity of interpreters, and to the extent that some agreement is reached about meaning at a particular time and place, that meaning can only be based on consensual community validation. Texts, then, must be "situated" within some literary context (Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanic 1999).

Kvale (1987) has suggested, The attempts to develop a logic of validation within the hermeneutical tradition are relevant for clarifying the validity of interpretation in the qualitative research interview.

The interpretation of meaning is characterized by a hermeneutical circle, or spiral. Understanding of a text takes place through a process where the meaning of the separate parts is determined by the global meaning of text. In principle, such a hermeneutical explanation of the text is an infinite process while it ends in practice when a sensible meaning, a coherent understanding, free of inner contradictions has been reached. (p. 62)

Knell (1984) has offered four principles for hermeneutic inquiry and analysis that can be applied beyond the interpretation of legends, literature, and historical documents:

1. Understanding a human act or product, and hence all learning, is like interpreting a text.

2. All interpretation occurs within a tradition.

3. Interpretation involves opening myself to a text (or its analogue) and questioning it.

4. I must interpret a text in the light of my situation (p. 68).

Hermeneutic researchers use qualitative methods to establish context and meaning for what people do. Hermeneutics "are much clearer about the fact that they are constructing the 'reality' on the basis of their interpretations of data with the help of the participants who provided the data in the study. . . . If other researchers had different backgrounds, used different methods, or had different purposes, they would likely develop different types of reactions, focus on different aspects of the setting, and develop somewhat different scenarios" (Bickelberger 1989:9). For concrete examples of hermeneutic investigations in psychology, see Tacker and Addison (1989).

Thus, one must know about the researcher as well as the researched to place any qualitative study in a proper, hermeneutical context. Hermeneutic theory argues that one can only interpret the meaning of something from some perspective, a certain standpoint, a praxis, or a situational context, whether one is reporting on one's own findings or reporting the perspectives of people being studied (and thus reporting their standpoint or perspective). These ideas have become commonplace in much contemporary social science and are now fundamental, even basic, in qualitative inquiry, but such was not always the case. Two centuries of philosophical dialogue provide our current foundation for understanding the centrality of interpretivism in qualitative research. As Croty (1998) concluded after his review of the historical development of hermeneutics and its influence on qualitative theory, "Our debt to the hermeneutic tradition is large" (p. 111).

**Narratology or Narrative Analysis**

**Foundational questions:**

What does this narrative or story reveal about the person or world from which it came? How can this narrative be interpreted so that it provides an understanding of and illuminates the life and culture that created it?

Hermeneutics originated in the study of written texts. Narratology, or narrative analysis, extends the idea of text to include in-depth interview transcripts, life history narratives, historical memoirs, and creative nonfiction. The hermeneutical perspective, with its emphasis on interpretation and context, informs narrative studies, as does interpretivist social science, literary nonfiction, and literary criticism. Narrative studies are also influenced by phenomenology's emphasis on understanding lived experience and perceptions of experience. "Fodor coined the term narratology in 1969 in an effort to elevate the term to the status of an object of knowledge for a new science" (Biesanz 1993:3).

Personal narratives, family stories, suicide notes, graffiti, literary nonfiction, and life histories reveal cultural and social patterns through the lens of individual experiences. Rhetoric of all kinds can be fodder for narrative analysis, for example, the rhetoric of politicians or teachers (Graham 1993). The "biographical turn in social science" (Chamberlayne et al. 2000) or the "narrative turn" in qualitative inquiry (Bochner 2001) honors people's stories as data that can stand on their own as pure description of experience...
Experience, worthy as narrative documentary of experience (the core of phenomenology) or analyzed for connections between the psychological, sociological, cultural, political, and dramatic dimensions of human experience. Robert Coles, Harvard professor of psychiatry and medical humanities (his title offers interesting narratological fodder), has written *The Call of Stories* (1989) as a basis for teaching, learning, and moral reflection. Michael White and David Epston in *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends* (1990) look at the power of stories in the lives of individuals and families and the connection between storytelling and therapy. They suggest that people have adjustment difficulties because the story of their life, as created by themselves or others, does not match their lived experience. They propose that therapists can help their patients by guiding them in rewriting their life stories.

The idea of "story," of personal narrative, intersects with our earlier look at autobiography in which the researcher's story becomes part of the inquiry into a cultural phenomenon of interest. The language of story carries a connotation different from that of case study. For example, in program evaluations, people may be invited to share their stories instead of being asked to participate in case studies. The central idea of narrative analysis is that stories and narratives offer especially translucent windows into cultural and social meanings.

Much of the methodological focus in narrative studies concerns the nature of interpretation, as in Norman Denzin's seminal qualitative works *Interpretive Biography* (1989a), *Interpretive Interactionism* (1998b), and *Interpretive Ethnography* (1997b). Interpretation of narrative poses the problem of how to analyze "talk and text" (Silverman 2000). Tom Barone (2000) has entered into literary nonfiction to hone his interpretive aesthetic:

All great literature, I think, lures those who experience it away from the shores of literal truth and out into uncharted waters where meaning is more ambiguous.

Ultimately, I eraced the boundary between the realm of text which purports to give only the facts and that of the metaphor-laden story which dares (as Sartre once put it) to lie in order to tell the truth. But I did so haltingly, and not in a single confident stroke of understanding. Indeed, my insight came only gradually, after confronting a form of writing that aims to straddle the boundary between actual and virtual worlds, one foot firmly planted in each. These works are hybrids of textual species, essays/stories written in a literary style but shelved (curiously) in the nondiscussion section of the library. (pp. 61-62)

Here we have an example of personal narrative in the form of the narrative researcher's report of his journey into cross-genre exploration of the nature of textual interpretation. Later he uses narrative as a method for exploring what it means to be a professional educational researcher, exploring the narratives researchers construct about themselves and implications of those narratives for their relationships with non-researchers (Barone 2000:201-28).

Tierney (2000), in contrast, examines historical biographies and testimonios to explore interpretive challenges in using life histories in the postmodern age. His narrative analysis looks at the intersection of the interpreted purpose of a text, the constructed and interpreted "truth" of a text, and the persona of the author in test creation, all of which are called into interpretive question in the postmodern age.

Tedlock (2000) examines different genres of ethnography as constituting varying forms of narrative. She distinguishes life histories and memoirs from "narrative ethnography," a hybrid form that was created in and attempts to portray accurately the biographies of people in the culture studied but also to include ethnographers' own experiences in their texts. She assesses this as a "sea change in ethnographic representation" because it unsettled "the boundaries that had been central to the notion of a self studying an other" and replaced it with an "ethnographic interchange" between self and other within a single text (pp. 460-61).
Narrative analysis has also now emerged as a specific approach to studying organizations. As such, it takes at least four forms:

1. Organizational research that is written in storylike fashion (tales of the field).
2. Organizational research that collects organizational stories (tales of the field).
3. Organizational research that conceptualizes organizational life as story making and organizational theory as story reading (interpretative approaches); and

Stories are at the center of narrative analysis, whether they be stories of teaching (Peskill and Jacobvitz 2000), stories of and by students (Barone 2000:19-31), stories of participants in programs (Kashner 2000), stories of fieldwork (Van Maanen 1988), stories of relationships (Bochner, Ellis, and Tilman-Hoey 1997), or stories of illnesses (Frank 1995, 2000). How to interpret stories is at the heart of narrative analysis.

Ecological Psychology

Foundational questions: What is the relationship between human behavior and the environment?

Several theoretical perspectives that inform qualitative inquiry are associated with particular disciplines. For example, hermeneutics is derived from linguistics and philosophy. Ethnography is the primary method of anthropology, while ethnomethodology and symbolic interaction developed out of sociology. Heuristic inquiry is grounded in humanistic psychology. A different psychology-based perspective is ecological psychology, which represents a different tradition and theoretical orientation because it makes different assumptions about what is important to understand about the human experience (Jacob 1987). Robert Barker (1968) and Herbert Wright (1987) of the University of Kansas developed ecological psychology drawing heavily on natural history field studies. They see individuals and the environment as interdependent (Barker and Wright 1955; Barker et al. 1978; Schoggen 1978). They begin with pure, detailed descriptions of an individual in an environment. They observe (as spectators, not participant observers) "streams of behavior" that are subsequently analyzed in terms of presumed goal-directed actions. "Coders draw upon their ordinary knowledge and perceptions to infer the goals that actors intend to achieve, marking off segments of narrative descriptions into segments leading toward specific goals" (Jacob 1988:17). The ecological metaphor can also inform psychological clinical research by seeking "to understand the patient's concern within the context of his or her life-world—the patient's personal, family, community, and ecological stories" (Miller and Crabtree 2000:167).

The unit of analysis in ecological psychology is primarily the individual, but Barker and Schoggen (1973) have also applied this approach in delineating Qualities of Community Life. What makes this approach of potential interest for program evaluation and organizational or community development is the focus on goal-directed behavior. They assume that there are subjective aspects to behavior which they examine in terms of the goals of human behavior. They also assume that there is a subjective aspect to the environments which they usually discuss in terms of a person's emotional reactions to the environment. For example, they might be concerned whether a boy does an activity unwillingly or unhappily (Jacob 1988:17).

Ecological psychologists also focus on delineating the central features of behavior settings, the particular constellations of places, things, and times that constitute a definitive environment. Such an approach can help make explicit what variety of environments program participants or organization members experience. While ecological psychologists begin with detailed, qualitative descriptions based on observations in natural environments, their coding schemes and analysis procedures are quantitative. Segments of goal-directed behavior and characteristics of behavior settings are coded numerically and analyzed statistically. This illustrates a point to which we shall return later: One can go from the thick description of qualitative data to quantitative analysis, but not vice versa. One cannot generate thick description and qualitative narrative from original quantitative data.

The focus in ecological psychology on the relationship between human behavior and the environment provides a good transition to the next perspective, systems theory, which is much more comprehensive and interdisciplinary in examining the context for human actions in programs, organizations, and communities.

A Systems Perspective and Systems Theory

Foundational questions: How and why does this system as a whole function as it does?

Parallel to the historical philosophical and methodological paradigms debate between positivists and constructivists, there has been another and corresponding paradigm debate about mechanistic/linear constructions of the world versus organic/systems constructions. This debate has been particularly intense among classic organizational theorists (Burns and Stalker 1972; Azumi and Hage 1972; Lincoln 1985; Gharajedaghi 1985; Morgan 1986, 1989). It includes concern about definitions of closed
systems versus open systems, and the implications of such boundary definitions for research, theory, and practice in understanding programs, organizations, entire societies, and even the whole world (Wallerstein 1980).

It is important to note at the outset that the term systems has many and varied meanings. In the digital age, systems analysis often means looking at the interface between hardware and software, or the connectivity of various networks. The idea of "systems thinking" was popularized as the crucial "fifth discipline" of organizational learning in Peter Senge's (1990) best-selling book, *The Fifth Discipline*. A number of management consultants have made systems thinking and analysis the centerpiece of their organizational development work (e.g., Ackoff 1987, 1999a, 1999b; Kim 1993, 1994, 1999; Anderson and Johnson 1997). Indeed, over the past 30 years, since publication of Ludwig Von Bertalanffy's General System Theory (1976), a vast literature has developed about systems theory and applied systems research (e.g., Checkland 1999). Some of it is highly quantitative and involves complex computer applications and simulations. Given this broad and multifaceted context, my purpose is quite modest. I want to call to the reader's attention three points: (1) A systems perspective is becoming increasingly important in dealing with and understanding real-world complexities, viewing things as whole entities embedded in context and still larger wholes; (2) some approaches to systems research lead directly to and depend heavily on qualitative inquiry; and (3) a systems orientation can be very helpful in framing questions and, later, making sense out of qualitative data.

Holistic thinking is central to a systems perspective. A system is a whole that is both greater than and different from its parts. Indeed, a system cannot validly be divided into independent parts as discrete entities of inquiry because the parts together constitute the system and the behavior of the parts on the whole depend on what is happening to the other parts. The parts are so interconnected and interdependent that any simple cause-effect analysis distorts more than it illuminates. Changes in one part lead to changes among all parts and the system itself. Nor can one simply add the parts in some linear fashion and get a useful sense of the whole.

Gharajedaghi and Ackoff (1985:23) are quite insistent that a system as a whole cannot be understood by analysis of separate parts. They argue that "the essential properties of a system are lost when it is taken apart; for example, a disassembled automobile does not transport and does not live." Furthermore, the function and meaning of the parts is lost when separated from the whole. Instead of taking things apart, they insist that a systems approach requires "synthetic thinking":

_Synthetic thinking is required to explain system behavior. It differs significantly from analysis. In the first step of analysis the thing to be explained is taken as a part in synthetic thinking it is taken to be a part of a larger whole. In the second step of analysis, the contained parts are explained in synthetic thinking, the containing whole is explained. In the final step of analysis, knowledge of the parts is aggregated into knowledge of the whole: in synthetic thinking understanding of the containing whole is disaggregated to explain the parts. It does so by revealing its role or function in that whole. Synthetic thinking reveals function rather than structure; it reveals why a system works the way it does, but not how it does so. Analysis and synthesis are complementary: neither replaces the other. Systems thinking incorporates both._

Because the effects of the behavior of the parts of a system are interdependent, it can be shown that if each part taken separately is made to perform as efficiently as possible, the system as a whole will not function as efficiently as possible. For example, if we select from all the automobiles available the best carburetor, the best distributor, and so on for each part required for an automobile, and then try to assemble them, we will not even obtain an automobile, let alone the best one, because the parts will not fit together. The performance of a system is not the sum of the independent effects of its parts in the product of their interactions. Therefore, effective management of a system requires managing the interactions of its parts, not the actions of its parts taken separately (Gharajedaghi and Ackoff 1985:23-24).

This kind of systems thinking has profound implications for program evaluation and policy analysis where the parts are often evaluated in terms of strengths, weaknesses, and impacts with little regard for how the parts are embedded in and interdependent with the whole program or policy (Patton 1986). For example, Benko and Stavrunski (2000) applied systems theory as a framework for patient-focused evaluation in nursing and other health care areas. Such a framework, they found, allowed complex features of processes in health care to appear by conducting simultaneous analyses of relationships on different levels and with different methods. This contrasts with the mostly one-level, reductionist designs that have usually been employed in nursing and health care research. Their "systemic model" offered insights into system dynamics in both "downward" and "upward" directions—and the interconnections of these system dynamics in affecting patient care and science.

In addition to their influence in organizational development, systems approaches have become very important in family research and therapy (Schultz 1984; Montgomery and Fewer 1988; Rosenblatt 1985; Miller and Winstead-Fry 1982; Hoffman 1981). A systems approach has also become one of the central orientations to international development efforts in recent years. Specifically, the farming systems approach to development (Farming Systems Support Project [FSSP] 1986) illustrates some unique ways of engaging in qualitative inquiry to support development, intervention, and evaluation from a systems perspective. The farming systems approach to evaluation and research is worth examining in detail because it has developed as a theory-based yet practical solution to agricultural development problems.

In the first three decades following World War II, much international development was conceived as direct technology transfer from more developed to less developed countries. Scientists and change agents made technology transfer recommendations within their disciplinary areas of specialization, for example, crops, livestock, water, and so on. This approach to development epitomizes a mechanistic orientation. In reaction to the dismal failures of the mechanistic, specialized technology transfer approach to development, a farming systems approach emerged (Shaner, Philipp, and Schmehl 1982b). Several elements are central to a farming systems perspective, elements that lead directly to qualitative methods of research.

1. Farming systems research and development (FSRD) is a team effort (Shaner, Philipp, and Schmehl 1982a).
2. FSRD is interdisciplinary. The team consists of representatives from a mix of both agricultural and social science disciplines (Cernea and Guggenheim 1985).
3. FSRD takes place in the field, on real farms, not at a university or government experiment station (Simmons 1985).

4. FSRD is collaborative—scientists and farmers work together on agricultural productivity within the goals, values, and situation of participating farmers (Galt and Mathema 1987).

5. FSRD is comprehensive, including attention to all farm family members; all farming operations, both crops and livestock; all labor sources; all income sources; and all other factors that affect small farm development (Harwood 1979).

6. FSRD is inductive and exploratory, beginning with open-ended inquiry into the nature of the farming system from the perspective of those in the system (Holtzman 1986).

7. FSRD begins with qualitative description. The first team task is fieldwork to qualitatively describe the system (Sands 1986).

8. FSRD is sensitive to context, placing the farming system in the larger agro-ecological, cultural, political, economic, and policy environments of which it is a part (Shaner et al. 1982a).

9. FSRD is interactive, dynamic, and process oriented. The interdisciplinary team begins with inductive exploration, then moves to trying out system changes, observing the effects, and adapting to emergent findings. The work is ongoing and developmental (FSSP 1986).

10. FSRD is situationally responsive and adaptive. There are many variations in FSRD projects depending on priority problems, available resources, team member preferences, and situation-specific possibilities (Sands 1986; FSSP 1987).

A farming systems approach includes both qualitative and quantitative forms of inquiry. It includes direct observations, informal interviews, naturalistic fieldwork, and inductive analysis. All within a systems framework. Well over 100 such projects in FSRD have been undertaken worldwide (FSSP 1987). There may be no larger-scale example of efforts to integrate naturalistic inquiry, quantitative methods, and a systems perspective through interdisciplinary evaluation and research teamwork for the purpose of promoting long-term social and economic developments.

FSRD is just one example of a systems approach to intervention, research, and evaluation. What this and other systems approaches illustrate is that the complex world of human beings cannot be fully captured and understood by simply adding up carefully measured and fully analyzed parts. At the system level (the whole program, the whole farm, the whole family, the whole organization, the whole community), there is a qualitative difference in the kind of thinking that is required to make sense of what is happening. Qualitative inquiry facilitates that understanding and research teamwork for the purpose of promoting long-term social and economic developments.

Yet, from a systems perspective, such a picture yields little real understanding of the elephant. To understand the elephant, it must be seen and understood in its natural ecosystem, whether in Africa or Asia, as one element in a complex system of flora and fauna. Only in viewing the movement of a herd of elephants across a real terrain, over time and across seasons, in interaction with plants, trees, and other animals will one begin to understand the evolution and nature of elephants and the system of which elephants are a part. That understanding can never come at a zoo.

As the story goes, nine blind people encounter an elephant. One touches the ear and proclaims that an elephant is like a fan. Another touches the trunk and says the elephant most surely resembles a snake. The third feels the elephant’s massive side and insists that it is like a wall. Yet, a fourth, feeling only a solidly planted leg, counters that it more resembles a tree trunk. The fifth grabs hold of the tail and experiences the elephant as a rope. And so it goes, each blindly touching only a part and generalizing inappropriately to the whole. The usual moral of the story is that only by putting all the parts together in right relation to each can one get a complete and whole picture of the elephant.

As a final story will reinforce this point, the fable of the nine blind people and the elephant, which I used in the second chapter to introduce the concept of systems thinking, but I’ll simply reintroduce it as a systems metaphor, which I used in the second chapter to introduce the concept of systems thinking. Besides, good stories have layers of meaning, and this one has phenomenological, hermeneutic, and even ethnographic implications, which the reader may want to reflect on, but I’ll simply reintroduce it as a systems tale. Ironically, it is often offered as an example of systems thinking, but is, in its usual Western telling, actually quite linear and mechanical.

As the story goes, nine blind people encounter an elephant. One touches the ear and proclaims that an elephant is like a fan. Another touches the trunk and says the elephant most surely resembles a snake. The third feels the elephant’s massive side and insists that it is like a wall. Yet, a fourth, feeling only a solidly planted leg, counters that it more resembles a tree trunk. The fifth grabs hold of the tail and experiences the elephant as a rope. And so it goes, each blindly touching only a part and generalizing inappropriately to the whole. The usual moral of the story is that only by putting all the parts together in right relation to each can one get a complete and whole picture of the elephant.

Yet, from a systems perspective, such a picture yields little real understanding of the elephant. To understand the elephant, it must be seen and understood in its natural ecosystem, whether in Africa or Asia, as one element in a complex system of flora and fauna. Only in viewing the movement of a herd of elephants across a real terrain, over time and across seasons, in interaction with plants, trees, and other animals will one begin to understand the evolution and nature of elephants and the system of which elephants are a part. That understanding can never come at a zoo.

Thus, are we reminded of the challenge—and importance—of bringing a systems perspective into qualitative inquiry.
prediction, even as it offers new ways to fulfill those needs. While much chaos research is highly mathematical, making sense of results seems to depend heavily on metaphors. Here is an intersection with qualitative inquiry that holds particular promise because much work in qualitative analysis, organizational development, and programs includes resort to metaphor (Patton 2000; Ronai 1999; Study 1998). Indeed, Gleick (1987) offers a metaphor to explain the very emergent ideas of chaos theory may give us ear dynamics (chaos) when we find it, with filling those needs. While much chaos research is highly mathematical, making sense of relations can be so threatening to our need for comfort and courage to describe nonlinear dynamics open up new possibilities for doing fieldwork in and understanding those settings that feel like walking through a maze whose walls rearrange themselves with every step you take" (p. 24).

This metaphor fits a great deal of fieldwork in real-world settings, but the implications can be so threatening to our need for order that we ignore the rearranging walls and describe the maze with a single, static diagram. If nothing else, the history and emergent ideas of chaos theory may give us the comfort and courage to describe nonlinear dynamics (chaos) when we find it, with filling those needs. While much chaos research is highly mathematical, making sense of relations can be so threatening to our need for comfort and courage to describe nonlinear dynamics open up new possibilities for doing fieldwork in and understanding those settings that feel like walking through a maze whose walls rearrange themselves with every step you take.

Grounded Theory

The grounded theory approach is the most influential paradigm for qualitative research in the social sciences today.

—Norman K. Denzin (1997a:18)

Grounded Theory

Michael Agar, a distinguished anthropologist, used complexity theory, especially the work of John Holland (1995; 1998), to interpret fieldwork findings in his study of a heroin epidemic among suburban youth in Baltimore County, Maryland. He concluded:

Complexity [theory] served, at least at the metaphorical level, to better define a research problem—explaining heroin trends—and it helps articulate why traditional social research has not answered this most basic question of drug research: How and why do trends occur? It also points at the kind of data we need to obtain and organize to do just that, however difficult that data might be to obtain. Furthermore, complexity handles some current anthropological research issues—like the inclusion of the researcher, broadening historical and political context, and the issue of prediction—as part of its central themes. With characteristics like holism, emergence, and feedback that map onto anthropological assumptions, complexity is clearly worth a closer look. (Agar 1999:119)

The metaphors of chaos, complexity, and nonlinear dynamics open up new possibilities for doing fieldwork in and understanding those settings that feel like walking through a maze whose walls rearrange themselves with every step you take.

Foundational question

What theory emerges from systematic comparative analysis and is grounded in fieldwork so as to explain what has been and is observed?

Now we turn from the fluidity of chaos to the solidity of the ground, specifically, grounded theory. Most of the theoretical perspectives examined thus far focus on a particular aspect of human experience: ethnography focuses on culture, ethnomethodology on everyday life, symbolic interactionism on symbolic meanings in behavior, semantics on signs, hermeneutics on interpretations, and phenomenology on lived experience. Their theoretical frameworks direct us to particular aspects of human experience as especially deserving of attention in our attempt to make sense of the social world. In contrast, grounded theory focuses on the process of generating theory rather than a particular theoretical context. It emphasizes steps and procedures for connecting induction and deduction through the constant comparative method, comparing research sites, doing theoretical sampling, and testing emergent concepts with additional fieldwork.

Concern for theory development is often quite marked in the literature on qualitative methods. The writings of Glaser (1978; 2000), Strauss and Corbin (1998), Denzin (1978b), Lofland and Lofland (1984), Blumer (1969), Whyte (1984), and Becker (1973), to name but a few well-known qualitative methodologists, take as a major focus the theory-method linkage means that how you study the world determines what you learn about the world. Grounded theory depends on methods that take the researcher into and close to the real world so that the results and findings are grounded in the empirical world. Herbert Blumer (1978) has offered a metaphor for explaining what it means to generate grounded theory by being immersed in the empirical world.

The empirical social world consists of ongoing group life and one has to get close to this life to know what is going on in it. The metaphor that I like is that of lifting the veil that obscures or hides what is going on. The task of scientific study is to lift the veil that covers the area of group life that one purposes to study.
Chaos Precepts and Assumptions (Gleick 1987)  

Implications for Qualitative Inquiry on Human Systems

1. "Nonlinearly means that the act of playing the game has a way of changing the rules" (p. 24).

2. A butterfly in Beijing flapping its wings may affect the weather in New York—next month or next year. "The butterfly effect" has a technical name. Sensitive dependence on initial conditions (p. 22).

3. A deterministic system can produce much more than just periodic behavior. There can be "wild disorder" among "islands of structure." A complex system can give rise to turbulence and coherence at the same time, each of which is important (p. 56).

4. "Simple systems can do complicated things" (p. 167).

5. "A healthy body is a chaotic one; when you reach an equilibrium in biology you are dead" (p. 298).

6. "On the collective scale and on the personal scale the ideas of chaos advance in different ways and for different reasons" (p. 316).

The veils are not lifted by substituting, in whatever degree, preformed images for first-hand knowledge. The veils are lifted by getting close to the area and by digging deep in it through careful study. Schemes of methodology that do not encourage or allow this betray the cardinal principle of respecting the nature of one's empirical world.... [The merit of naturalistic study is that it respects and stays close to the empirical domain. (p. 38)

All of the approaches to theory and research in this chapter use qualitative methods to stay grounded in the empirical world. Yet, they vary considerably in their conceptualizations of what is important to ask and consider in elucidating and understanding the empirical world. While the phrase "grounded theory" is often used as a general reference to inductive, qualitative analysis, as an identifiable approach to qualitative inquiry it consists of quite specific methods and systematic procedures (Glaser 2000, 2001). In their book on techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory, Strauss and Corbin (1990:13) emphasized that analysis is the interplay between researchers and data, so what grounded theory offers is a framework for a set of "coding procedures" to "help provide some standardization and rigor to the analytical process. Grounded theory is meant to "build theory rather than test theory." It strives to "provide researchers with analytical tools for handling masses of raw data." It seeks to help qualitative analysts "consider alternative meanings of phenomena." It emphasizes being "systematic and creative simultaneously." Finally, it elucidates "the concepts that are the building blocks of theory." Glaser (1993) and Strauss and Corbin (1997) have collected together in edited volumes a range of grounded theory exemplars that include several studies of health (life after heart attacks, emphysema, chronic renal failure, Alzheimer's disease), organizational headhunting, abusive relationships, women alone in public places, selfhood in women, prison time, and characteristics of contemporary Japanese society.

Grounded theory has opened the door to qualitative inquiry in many traditional academic social sciences and education departments, especially as a basis for doctoral dissertations, in part, I believe, because of its overt emphasis on the importance of and specific procedures for generating theory. In addition, I suspect its popularity may owe much to the fact that it unabashedly admonishes the researcher to strive for "objectiv-
She believes that the guidelines for grounded theory offered by Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998) "structure objectivist grounded theorists' work." These guidelines are didactic and prescriptive rather than emergent and interactive" (Charmaz 2000: 524). In contrast, she believes that in a constructivist grounded theory, "causality is suggestive, incomplete, and indeterminate. . . . It looks at how 'variables' are grounded given meaning and played out in subjects' lives. . . . Their meanings and actions take priority over researchers' analytic interests and methodological technology" (p. 524). To illustrate a constructivist approach to grounded theory, she presents to the reader the kinds of questions she would ask to study a topic such as pain:

I start by viewing the topic of pain subjectively as a feeling, an experience that may take a variety of forms. Then I ask these questions: What makes pain, pain? (That is, what is essential to the phenomenon as defined by those who experience it?) What defining properties or characteristics do I or people attribute to it? When do they do so? . . . How does the person experience this pain, and what, if anything, does he or she do about it? My questions aim to get at meanings, not at truths. As a result, a constructivist grounded theory may remain at a more intuitive, impressionistic level than an objectivist approach" (Charmaz 2000:526).

Beyond drawing on the inductive and layered emphases in grounded theory a la Strauss and Corbin, it is hard to see how what Charmaz describes is different from basic phenomenological inquiry. As a matter of philosophical distinctness, then, grounded theory is best understood as fundamentally realist and objectivist in orientation, emphasizing disciplined and procedural ways of getting the researcher's biases out of the way but adding healthy doses of creativity to the analytic process. We shall consider the analytic procedures of grounded theory in more detail in the chapter on analyzing qualitative data. As a theoretical framework, I have included it in this chapter because of its emphasis on generating theory as the primary purpose of qualitative social science and the overt embrace of objectivity as a research stance.

Oriental Qualitative Inquiry: Feminist Inquiry, Critical Theory, and Queer Theory as Examples

One of the strengths of qualitative methods is the inductive, naturalistic inquiry strategy of confronting a setting without predetermined hypotheses. Rather, understanding and theory emerge from fieldwork experiences and are grounded in the data. The problem is how to approach the field with an open mind. Phenomenology includes recommended procedures for becoming clear about and taking into account biases and predispositions during both fieldwork and analysis so as to get at the true essence of the phenomenon under study. Hermeneutics takes the position that nothing can be interpreted free of some perspective, so the first priority is to capture the perspective and elucidate the context of the people being studied. The researcher's own perspective must also be made explicit, as must any other tradition or perspective brought to bear when interpreting meanings.

Oriental qualitative inquiry goes one step farther. Oriental qualitative inquiry eschews any pretense of open-mindedness or ideological perspective. Oriental qualitative inquiry begins with an explicit theoretical or ideological perspective that determines what conceptual framework will direct fieldwork and the interpretation of findings. For example, one can undertake a study from a feminist perspective, a Marxist perspective, a capitalist perspective, or a Freudian perspective, among others. In these instances, the ideological orientation or perspective of the researcher determines the focus of inquiry. A feminist perspective presumes the importance of gender in human relationships and societal processes and orient the study in that direction (Guerrero 1998; Ribbons and Edwards 1988; Maguire 1994; Reinharz 1992; Clemons 1983; Smith 1979). Principles of feminist inquiry (Guerrero 1999a:15-22; Thompson 1992) can include:

- a sense of connectedness and equality between researcher and researched;
- explicitly acknowledging and valuing "women's ways of knowing" including integrating reason, emotion, intuition, experience, and analytic thought;
- participatory processes that support consciousness-raising and researcher reflexivity; and
- going beyond knowledge generation, beyond "knowledge for its own sake," to engage in using knowledge for change, especially "knowledge about women that will contribute to women's liberation and emancipation" (Guerrero 1999a: 16-17).

How does the lens of gender shape and affect our understandings and actions? Philosopher Elizabeth Minnich has investigated the ways in which conceptual approaches to classifying human beings, embedded historically, culturally, and politically, continue to shape our thinking through the very language and categories available to us. Her book on the subject,
Transforming Knowledge (1990, forthcoming), speaks precisely and insightfully to the orientation of feminist inquiry. The text problem reappears in different guises in all fields and throughout the dominant tradition. It is, simply, that while the majority of humankind was excluded from education and the making of what has been called knowledge, the dominant few not only defined themselves as the inclusive kind of humans but also as the norm and the ideal. A few privileged men defined themselves as constituting mankind/humankind and simultaneously saw themselves as akin to what mankind/humankind ought to be in fundamental ways that distinguished them from all others. Thus, at the same time they removed women and non-privileged men within their culture and other cultures from "mankind," they justified that exclusion on the grounds that the excluded were by nature and culture "lesser" people (if they even thought of the others as having "cultures"). Their notion of who was properly human was both exclusive and hierarchical with regard to those they took to be properly subject to them—women in all roles; men who worked with their hands; male servants and slaves; women and men from many other cultures.

Thus, they created root definitions of what it means to be human that, with the concepts and theories that flowed from and reinforced those definitions, made it difficult to think well about, or in the mode of, anyone other than themselves, just as they made it difficult to think honestly about the defining few.

The concepts and conceptual frameworks we use, whether unconsciously as a matter of tradition or training or intentionally as a matter of choice, carry embedded messages about what and who is important. Feminist inquiry challenges the phenomenological notion that one can cleanse oneself of such fundamental language-based conceptions when doing fieldwork and data analysis. Moreover, feminist inquiry provides not only conceptual and analytical direction but also methodological orientation in emphasizing participatory, collaborative, change-oriented, and empowering forms of inquiry. A quite different theoretical framing for inquiry would be Foucauldian orientation that assumes that individual behavior must be understood as a manifestation of the struggle between id, ego, and superego as influences very early childhood relationships and sexual experiences that have left their mark on the unconscious. Orientations can be combined, as in a feminist psychoanalytical framework (Eichenbaum and Orbach 1983).

Racism and ethnicity can be another defining lens—or orientation—for qualitative inquiry in research and evaluation (Ladson-Billings 2000; Stanfield 1999; Patton 1994), as can inclusiveness (Mertens 1998, 1999).

"Queer theory," an orientational approach focused on sexual orientation, "took social constructionist insights and added a post-structuralist critique of the unified, autonomous self," so a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender orientation informs inquiry as "a deconstructive enterprise, taking apart the view of a self defined by something at its core, be it sexual desire, race, gender, nation, or class" (Gamson 2003:348).

One of the most influential orientational frameworks is "critical theory," which focuses on how injustice and subjugation shape people's experiences and understandings of the world.

A critical social theory is concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, matrices of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion and other social institutions and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system. Inquiry that aspires to the name of critical must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society. Research thus becomes a transformative endeavor unencumbered by the label political and unafraid to consummate a relationship with emancipatory consciousness (Kinchelele and McLaren 2000:281, 291).

Thus, what gives critical theory its name—what makes it critical—is that it seeks not just to study and understand society but rather to critique and change society. Influenced by Marxism, informed by the presupposition of the centrality of class conflict in understanding community and societal structures (Crotty 1988, Heyderbrand 1983; Carchedi 1985), and updated in the radical struggles of the 1960s, critical theory provides a framework—both philosophical and methodological—for approaching research and evaluation as fundamentally and explicitly political, and as change-oriented forms of engagement. Fonte (2001) offers an example of critical theory applied to public policy. Fonte applies the perspective of Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci to contemporary American politics, considering how dominant and subordinate groups based on race and gender struggle over power in ways that make every aspect of life political.

Within each of these theoretical or ideological orientations one can undertake qualitative inquiry; but the focus of inquiry is determined by the framework within which one is operating and findings are interpreted and given meaning from the perspective of that preconceived theory. Such qualitative inquiry, therefore, aims to describe and explain specific manifestations of already-preconceived general patterns. Such inquiry is aimed at confirmation and elucidation rather than discovery. I have chosen the term orientational to describe such studies because they are oriented in a particular direction or framed from a specific perspective. Orientational is a more neutral term than ideologically based inquiry.

The extent to which any particular study is orientational is a matter of degree. Ethnographic studies can be viewed as orientational to the extent that they presume the centrality of culture in explaining human experience. "Critical ethnography" (Thomas 1995) combines the focus on culture with the commitment to use findings for change. Symbolic interactionism is orientational in focusing on the importance of the meanings that emerge as people define situations through interpersonal interactions. Orientational qualitative inquiry is a legitimate and important approach to theoretical or ideological elaboration, confirmation, and elucidation. What is required is that the researcher be very clear about the theoretical framework being used and the implications of that perspective on study focus, data collection, fieldwork, and analysis.
| **EXHIBIT 3.6** Variety in Qualitative Inquiry: Theoretical Traditions |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| **Perspective**             | **Disciplinary Roots**       | **Central Questions**       |
| 1. Ethnography              | Anthropology                 | What is the culture of this group of people? |
| 2. Autobiography            | Literary arts                | How does my experience of this culture connect with and offer insights about this culture, situation, event, and/or way of life? |
| 3. Reality testing;         | Philosophy, social          | What's really going on in the real world? |
| Postpositivist and realist  | sciences, and evaluation    | What can we establish with some degree of certainty? What are plausible explanations for verifiable patterns? What's the truth as far as we can get at it? How can we study a phenomenon so that our findings correspond, as much as possible, to the real world? |
| approaches                   |                             |                             |
| 4. Constructionism/         | Sociology                   | How have the people in this setting constructed reality? What are their reported perceptions, "truths," explanations, beliefs, and worldviews? What are the consequences of these constructions for their behaviors and for those with whom they interact? |
| constructionism             |                             |                             |
| 5. Phenomenology            | Philosophy                  | What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people? |
| 6. Heuristic inquiry        | Humanistic psychology       | What is my experience of this phenomenon and the essential experience of others who also experience this phenomenon intensely? |
| 7. Ethnomethodology         | Sociology                   | How do people make sense of their everyday activities so as to behave in socially acceptable ways? |
| 8. Symbolic interaction     | Social psychology           | What common set of symbols and understandings has emerged to give meaning to people's interactions? |

rated five major theoretical perspectives as the foundations of social research: positivism (and postpositivism), interpretivism (which includes phenomenology, hermeneutics, and symbolic interactionism), critical inquiry, feminism, and postmodernism (to which he adds an "etc." to suggest the open-ended nature of such a classification). Creswell (1998) also settled on five traditions of qualitative inquiry, but a different five: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. Jacob (1987) chose yet a different five for a qualitative taxonomy: ecological psychology, holistic ethnography, ethnography of communication, cognitive anthropology, and symbolic interactionism. Schwandt (2000) highlighted "three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry": interpretivism, hermeneutics, and social constructivism. Denzin and Lincoln (2000a) organized their review of qualitative variety around seven historical periods and seven "paradigms/theories": positivist/postpositivist, constructivist, feminist, ethnic, Marxist, cultural studies, and queer theory. Wolcott (1992) created a family tree of 20 distinct branches showing different "qualitative strategies." Tesch (1990) identified 27 varieties. Having examined some of the various attempts to classify qualitative approaches, Miles and Huberman (1994) concluded, "As comprehensive and clarifying as these catalogs and taxonomies may be, they turn out to be basically incommensurate, both in the way different qualitative strands are defined.
What do we believe about the nature of reality? (ontological debates concerning the possibility of a singular, verifiable reality and truth vs. the inevitability of socially constructed multiple realities)

How do we know what we know? (epistemological debates about the possibility and desirability of objectivity, subjectivity, causality, validity, generality, and sensitivity to context)

How should we study the world? (methodological debates about what kinds of data and design to emphasize for what purposes and with what consequences)

What is worth knowing? (philosophical debates about what matters and why)

What questions should we ask? (disciplinary and interdisciplinary debates about the importance of various burning questions, inquiry traditions, and areas of inquiry)

How do we personally engage in inquiry? (praxial debates about interacting, personal experiences and values into the inquiry, including issues of voice and political action)

The same program, organization, or community studied by researchers from different perspectives will lead to quite different studies even though they might all undertake observations, interviews, and document analysis. Nor would it necessarily be possible to synthesize the descriptions and findings of such different studies even though they took place in the same setting. When researchers operate from different frameworks, their results will not be readily interpretable by or meaningful to each other. While the frameworks provide guidance and a basis for interaction among researchers operating within the same framework, the different theoretical frameworks constitute barriers that impede interaction across and among different perspectives. In effect, each theoretical framework is a miniparadigm with its own internal logic and assumptions. This means one cannot reasonably ask which theoretical framework is "right," best, or most useful. It depends on what one wants to do and which assumptions one shares. Gareth Morgan (1983) stated the problem quite succinctly after presenting a variety of research perspectives:

There was the question as to how the reader could come to some conclusion regarding the reality of nature, signification, and claims of the different perspectives. . . . I realized that there was a major problem here. . . . There is a fallacy in the idea that the propositions of a system can be proved, disproved, or evaluated on the basis of axioms within that system. . . . This means that it is not possible to judge the validity or contribution of different research perspectives in terms of the ground assumptions of any one set of perspectives, since the process is self-justifying. Hence the attempt in much social science debate to judge the utility of different research strategies in terms of universal criteria based on the importance of generalizability, predictability, and control, explanation of variance, meaningful understanding, or whatever are inevitably flawed. These criteria inevitably favor research strategies consistent with the assumptions that generate such criteria as meaningful guidelines for the evaluation of research. It is simply inadequate to try to justify a particular style of research in terms of assumptions that give rise to that style of research. . . . Different research perspectives make different kinds of knowledge claims, and the criteria as to what counts as significant knowledge vary from one to another. (pp. 14-15)

In other words, readers must make their own decisions about the relative value of any given perspective. Each has strengths, which each also has limitations. There is no universal standard that can be applied to choose among these different frameworks. Quite the contrary, the diversity itself is a good indicator of the complexity of human phenomena and the challenges involved in conducting research.

Finally, a caution would seem in order about the danger of reifying the theoretical distinctions offered in this chapter. Take a look again at Exhibit 3.1, my reply to a letter from a graduate student desperate to figure out what category of inquiry she fits into. The boundaries between perspectives remain fuzzy. Adherents within each perspective can be found arguing about what is essential to that perspective. Tom Schwandt, who has studied these distinctions as much as anyone and is the lexicographer of the Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry (2001), offers this reflection on theoretical distinctions:

It seems to be a uniquely American tendency to categorize and label complicated theoretical perspectives as either this or that. Such labeling is dangerous, for it blurs us to encompass issues, shared concerns, and points of tension that cut across the landscape of the movement, issues that each inquirer must come to terms with in developing an identity as a social inquirer. In wrestling with the ways in which these philosophies forestall our efforts to understand what it means to "do qualitative inquiry," what we face is not a choice of which label—interpretivist, constructivist, hermeneuticist, or something else—best suits us. Rather, we are confronted with choices about how each of us wants to live the life of a social inquirer. (Schwandt 2000:205)

Pragmatism

Having documented the variety of theoretical perspectives that inform qualitative inquiry, we now leave the world of theory and enter the world of practice and pragmatism. Not all questions are theory based. Indeed, the quite concrete and practical questions of people working to make the world a better place (and wondering if what they're doing is working) can be addressed without plac...
One can use statistics in straightforward ways without doing a philosophical literature review of logical empiricism or realism. One can make an interpretation without studying hermeneutics. And one can conduct open-ended interviews or make observations without reading treatises on phenomenology. The methods of qualitative inquiry now stand on their own as reasonable ways to find out what is happening in programs and other human settings.

The next chapter explores some of the ways in which qualitative inquiry can contribute to practical knowledge and pragmatic understandings. To help make that transition, this chapter ends with a practical cautionary tale from Halcolm.

The Apple of Your Eye

After Halcolm had completed explaining to a scholarly assembly the many differing perspectives one could use in looking at the world, he was hungry. While he answered questions and continued the discussion, he sent a listener to inquire if the midday meal was ready. The messenger did not return, so Halcolm sent a second messenger. The second messenger did not return. So Halcolm went himself. He found the two messengers, the chef, and three visiting scholars engaged in heated debate. Ignoring the debate, Halcolm asked, "Is the midday meal ready?"

The first and eldest visiting scholar responded, "I have been explaining to these young men that the state of the food is not the only issue in determining readiness. The meal is not just food. The meal must include those who would partake of the food, so the meal is not ready until everything is in order and those who would eat are assembled."

The second visiting scholar said, "Readiness is a state of mind, not a physical state. Since the food has no mind, the food cannot be ready. Only people can be ready." Halcolm, meanwhile, sat down and ate his midday meal. A student asked why he had not joined the debate to clarify these important issues. Halcolm replied, "The midday meal is at midday every day. At midday the meal is ready. Why ask if the meal is ready? It is midday. This is the meal. Therefore the midday meal is ready."

With that, they all began talking at once making ever finer points, drawing ever narrower distinctions. Halcolm took another bite and replied, "The apple of your eye won't satisfy the emptiness in your stomach. There is a time to talk about the nature of eating-and there is a time to eat."

—From Halcolm's Guide for Gourmets
called of anthropology, strong gender identity would also be a prerequisite. That, however, might be conjured up. I had felt a vague sense of something while gazing toward Lancelot Point. Malcolm suggested that the Canyon was putting me in touch with my masculine collective unconscious. After ten days in the Canyon such things could be said without sounding absurd. Like eating freeze-dried food. It can taste gourmet scrumptious after a hard day hiking, but cooked at home, it’s ghastly. So I found that my Canyon initiation vision didn’t reconstitute well mixed with urban fluoridated water.

But it also didn’t evaporate. Malcolm now smiles and says he never doubted. I, on the other hand, still find myself amazed that we actually did return with Brandon for an initiation experience. And, being a social science researcher, I kept field notes. Not, I should add, because I had any premonition that they might reveal something important about a humanist approach to coming of age in contemporary society. I did it for family history and, I concede, out of habit. I had spent too many years in sociological observation to turn off that part of myself just because I had brought my eldest son into one of the most magnificent landscapes on earth after many years of anticipation. I considered leaving my scientific side behind. I even tried. Just be a father, I told myself. Just be in the Canyon. Be present with Brandon. Don’t analyze it while it’s happening. Stay with the experience. Or were those Malcolm’s admonitions? Certainly, some part of me was intrigued by Malcolm’s belief that he got answers from the Canyon. And, unlike our first hike years earlier, this time I found I had come with a question, though I wasn’t fully aware of it until our second night.

We were camped within the inner gorge, just short of the Colorado River, where White Creek flows out of Muav Canyon into Shinumo Creek. My aching body craved rest after two hard days hiking, but Brandon’s after-dinner questions about how different cultures define manhood had left me tossing and turning. He slept near enough for me to hear his slow, even breathing. As I studied him, he rolled from his back onto his side, pulling his knees up fetus-like, almost, but not quite, transforming his gawking, 18-year-old frame into a picture of innocence. He looked like the question he had asked over dinner.

He had begun with a mocking tone: “So, this is my initiation. When do I find out about the manhood thing? I’m sure you two have come prepared with important insights. Might as well get on with it. I, your humble initiate, am all ears.”

Our subsequent anthropological discussion about how different societies define manhood was rooted in cultural relativism as solidly as the large cottonwood that sheltered our campsite. The discussion had been serious, intense and surprisingly lacking in satisfaction. Not for Brandon. For me. As I gazed at Brandon sleeping, voices argued with each other in my head. What does a modern father tell his son about being a man? Some voices, recorded in my memory long ago, rasped repeatedly like a worn needle stuck in scratched grooves from the waxen days of graduate school. Others, more relevant, echoed in my head. To feel it, you have to descend within. To learn from it, you have only to stay awhile and be present. At least that’s what Malcolm had claimed when he first urged me to hike with him from Apache Point to Elves Chasm years earlier. And learn I had, about bloody blisters, debilitating thirst, and the importance of moving quickly when a rock ledge gives way a thousand feet above the canyon floor, especially if you’re standing on it at the time. Modest learnings. But they left an impression. As did the depth and beauty of the Canyon.

Malcolm had been bringing questions about his life to the Canyon for years. And getting answers. I had gotten no answers on that first trip. But that, Malcolm explained, was because I had brought no questions. Fair enough. I had come for the hike and a chance to walk among the oldest exposed rocks on the Earth’s surface.

But I did get an idea. Standing atop Mount Huethawali and staring across the Colorado River at Holy Grail Temple, I imagined someday hiking with my son, then just entering toddlerhood, and initiating him into manhood there amidst buttes named King Arthur Castle, Guinevere Castle, and Excalibur, and gorges named Merlin Abyss and Modred Abyss. Malcolm called it a vision, which beguilingly transformed a passing notion into a grandiosity. And getting answers. I had gotten no answers on that first trip. But that, Malcolm explained, was because I had brought no questions. Fair enough. I had come for the hike and a chance to walk among the oldest exposed rocks on the Earth’s surface.

But I did get an idea. Standing atop Mount Huethawali and staring across the Colorado River at Holy Grail Temple, I imagined someday hiking with my son, then just entering toddlerhood, and initiating him into manhood there amidst buttes named King Arthur Castle, Guinevere Castle, and Excalibur, and gorges named Merlin Abyss and Modred Abyss. Malcolm called it a vision, which beguilingly transformed a passing notion into a quest, like framing a telephone doodle and calling it art. What better place for grandiosity than the Grand Canyon?

The gilt frame, however, didn’t quite make it back with me to Minnesota. I realized that I lacked a few of the basic necessities for conducting an initiation. Tribal elders, for example. Hard to come by if you don’t have a tribe. As are other essentials, like tradition, a sacred place, ritual, terrifying gods to appease, wisdom to pass on, and life-threatening tests for the initiate to pass (preferably ones that the initiator has successfully survived). From what I re-
I entered, played intermittently through the scratches. The messages from different eras competed to be heard, rising to a discordant crescendo, like being caught in a small gym between opposing fans and their blaring pep bands at a championship basketball game—exhilarating only if you know which side to cheer for.

Such imagery being incongruent with my peaceful environs, though I enjoy both debate and athletic competition, I redirected my inner musings to the steady gurgle of nearby rapids and the chirping melodies of the canyon night. I quietly got up to stroll back and forth along the creek, pondering what I wanted to pass on to Brandon about the nature of manhood. I paused in the shadow of encouragement from my good friend and Canyon guide, also an anthropologist and family therapist, had explained that initiation rites functioned to psychologically separate the child from the parent. We had arrived at the Great Unconformity, we joked about what it meant to arrive some place that isn’t there. As we hiked on within the depths of the inner canyon, we marveled at the dramatic transition from sand and gravel to sculptured stone, its significance gradually penetrating with the cold feel of the marble-like rock. Now, inspired by the memory of that geologic gap, I contemplated the chasm that exists between modern society and ancient times. Many experience the gap as a painful loss. Lately, contemporary male elders have been trying to fill in the gap, build a bridge back or at least make a connection. They hope a return to ancient initiation rites will help close the gap. I had been attracted by that possibility myself, but Brandon’s reactions during our hike had said it wouldn’t work, at least not for modern young people who have tasted choice, experienced the power of intellect, learned to value individuality and abhor control. The Great Unconformity impressed on me the gap between past and present when societal customs have been eroded to the point of vanishing. Our ancestral past will necessarily and inevitably remain a foundation, like the ancient Vishnu Schist, formed by 75,000 pounds per square inch of tectonic pressure and named for the Hindu god, the Preserver. The Tapeats formation now rises atop that preserved foundation, but is neither part of it nor continuous in time. The Tapeats formation now rises atop that preserved foundation, but is neither part of it nor continuous in time.

Brandon. No outside influences. No competition from television, telephones, friends or work. Ten whole days with my son in the Grand Canyon. Ten days before he left home for college and the rest of his adult life. Ten final days. A last chance.

I returned to where Brandon slept and, gazing at him, considered whether it much mattered what I had to say—words, after all, being only words. But words matter in my world, as do answers. Thought matters. And so I thought some more until, under the influence of that elixir unique to the small hours when the body is exhausted and the internal dialogue worn down, I experienced at last a euphoria of analogical clarity. I came as I turned and peered into the dark gorge through which we had descended. That very afternoon, we had traversed the Canyon’s Great Unconformity, in one step passing through a gap of 250 million years across a space that had once been filled with massive mountains. Recalling that moment took me through what felt like a parallel unconformity, insignificant by standards of Canyon time, but huge when measured on the modest scale of human evolution. Canyon metaphor offered sociological insight. Malcolm would later say the Canyon had answered my question.

The Canyon’s Great Unconformity had once been filled with towering Precambrian formations of Bass Limestone, Hakatai Shale, Shinumo Quartzite, Dox Sandstone, and Cardenas Basalts 800 million to one-and-a-quarter billion years old. They had been turned sideways and thrust up higher than the Rockies by monumental tectonic movements. During this churning, twisting and thrusting, even more ancient rocks were exposed in places: hardened magma of Zonester Granites and the oldest rock in the Grand Canyon, the metamorphosed lava-black Vishnu Schist, 1.7 billion years old. Over millions of years these mountains were eroded until the space they once occupied was filled with sandstone deposited by uncoaching seas.

I imagined a contemporary coming of age journey that recognizes ancient foundations of human experience, but is separate and distinct in accordance with modern discontinuities and the great unconformity of human potential in our times—a coming of age process that does not require the societal equivalent of 75,000 pounds per square inch of pressure to assure conformity. Indeed, a coming of age process that does not even have conformity as its goal. That would be the greatest unconformity.
I thought I had come to the Grand Canyon for a ritual of initiation—recognizing and celebrating Brandon’s manhood. But as we had descended into the inner Canyon, the focus shifted for me. There, in the moonlight, I admitted why. He was leaving home and going off to college. We needed no ceremony to recognize his independence. It was not in doubt. Nor was his manhood. What I craved, that ancient rituals could not provide and had not been designed to arrange, was connection.

Abruptly, propelled by the force of illusory insight, I turned again away from the rapids toward Brandon and sleep. A piercing pain in my leg stopped me. I had connected with a Prickly Pear cactus. Examining the offending thorn, I heard my voice say: "Reality-check." Suddenly self-conscious, I looked around, then laughed out loud at the ridiculous figure I presented: pacing the canyon floor dressed only in the ephemeral threads of an emerging sociological paradigm shift.


Particularly Appropriate Qualitative Applications

Apprenticeship in Pragmatism

A young carpenter, at the beginning of his career, came to Halcolm in distress. He had studied diligently to master carpentry. At the completion of his apprenticeship, the master carpenters said that his technical competence and skill were unmatched for one so young.

Halcolm knew all this, for word of the young man’s mastery had reached even the great one. Yet, Halcolm could also see that the young carpenter was in great distress. "What troubles you?" Halcolm asked gently.

“My parents, my townspeople, my master teachers have been most generous. Upon completion of my apprenticeship, they joined together to give me a fine set of tools. I have been trained by the best. I am told that my skills are—what can I say without being immodest?—my skills are adequate.” The young man paused, his distress obvious and growing even as he spoke.

"Then what is the problem?" asked Halcolm. The young man looked down, embarrassed in the presence of the great one. It was a long time before he spoke, and then only in a whisper. “I have nothing to build.”

“Ah, I see,” said Halcolm.

“No one will give me any orders,” continued the young man.