PART

I

Conceptual and Historical Context

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

FOCUS YOUR READING

■ Many disciplines use qualitative research

■ Some combine qualitative research and quantitative research

■ Definitions

■ Common elements

■ Growth of qualitative research

■ Comparisons between qualitative research and quantitative research

■ Validity

I t is the first week of the new semester, and you are inundated with things to do. If you are like many students, you are juggling numerous components of your life: your family, your work, and your education. You might have teenage children or aging parents, or you may just be out of undergraduate school. You might be taking one course in the evening, or you might be enrolled in an online course; you might be taking several courses. Your major could be psychology, business, social work, or nursing. Or you could be studying family therapy or political science. You might be working, or you might have taken some time off for your schooling. Whatever your circumstance, I hope you find that the study of **qualitative research** (QR) will open your eyes to new ways of asking and answering questions about the world in which you live.

This is a particularly exciting time to study QR. As a way to explore human behavior, QR is being used in many innovative ways. Researchers take advantage of access to news events as they are happening and as they become available through YouTube or Facebook. Others use technology, such as smartphones or tablets, as an alternative way of collecting **data**. New ideas for what to study and how to study appear almost daily.

QR is the perfect approach to use if you want to learn more about human interaction. By the time you have completed this QR book, you will be well on the way to answering many questions about human beings. I was with a friend last week, and she asked me, "What is qualitative research?" I tried to give her a simple answer by turning the question back on her. I knew that she had been a teacher of children. We talked about different kinds of questions we might ask about children, schooling, and learning. I provided a simple scenario: Suppose she was interested in determining a way to teach reading that might lead to greater proficiency. Suppose one group of kids was taught the sounds of letters while another group was asked to memorize simple words. Then all the kids were given a reading test. Which group did better? You could compare the test scores of each group to answer that question.

Let me be clear: This example is about traditional experimental or quantitative research (QN). It is a simplified example designed to illustrate how many people think about research: two groups, two ways of teaching reading, and test scores. This type of research is the foundation of QN. It is basically very simple: An experiment is designed that involves one group that receives a treatment (a drug or, in this case, a particular reading program). The other group does not receive the treatment. The question is asked, how does the treatment affect the outcome? In this example, the outcome is test scores. If those who received the particular reading program have higher test scores than those who received a different program, a researcher might conclude that it was the treatment (or program) that caused the scores to be higher. This is the foundation of experimental research, albeit a very simplified illustration. It involves variables, treatment, and hypothesis testing.

Qualitative researchers address different kinds of questions. They go about answering them in different ways. They do not deal with variables, treatment, or hypothesis testing. For the moment, let's stay with an educational setting. Gray (n.d.) studied a Saskatoon English language arts teacher to understand how he provided instruction. The researcher did not collect any test scores. Gray spent time in the teacher's classroom and described it in detail in her study. It is fascinating to read this qualitative study, which reports her findings in a **narrative style**. You can see, then, that QR is of a different nature than QN.

■ Qualitative Research Is Used in Many Disciplines

It is safe to say that in 2013, QR as a way to answer questions is no longer a new idea. While various fields accept or value QR to a greater or lesser extent, it is clear that QR is not the stepchild that it was in the last millennium. Whether in journalism, urban studies, social work, or behavioral sciences, QR is used and will continue to be used by researchers. Brinkmann (2011), in his keynote address to the 17th Qualitative Health Research Conference in Vancouver, BC, stated that within the last two decades, QR has become generally accepted as a legitimate **scientific** way of working. Birkinshaw, Brannen, and Tung (2011) introduced a special issue of the *Journal of International Business* by suggesting that QR can "reclaim its

position as an integral part of international business research" (p. 573). A call for "a day in qualitative psychology" at a preconference event at the 8th International Congress on Qualitative Inquiry, held in May 2012, acknowledged the concern by some psychologists (e.g., Benozzo from Italy, Brinkmann from Denmark, Puebla from Mexico, and Geignani from the United States) that psychology has, by and large, remained outside the wave of QR. These psychologists urged that others come together to reflect on the status of QR in psychology in the twenty-first century.

The above ideas are relatively recent. But things were brewing in 1994, in the health field, for example. Black's (1994) editorial in the *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health* concluded,

> More frequent use of qualitative methods will greatly enhance both aetiological and health services research. Failure to use them more has retarded the advance in medical knowledge and at times led to false trails being followed. This has partly arisen because of skepticism on the part of quantitative scientists about the objectivity and rigor of qualitative methods. While this view may be justified occasionally, it is not a valid reason for ignoring the potential use of qualitative methods. As the statistician J. W. Tukey pointed out, 'far better an approximate answer to the right question . . . than an exact answer to the wrong question.' If such advice is ignored we run the risk of pursuing the measurable rather than the relevant. This would have serious consequences for our understanding both of the causes of diseases and how to improve health services. (p. 426)

Initially, the social sciences in U.S. universities adopted **research methods** drawn from the natural sciences. (It was not the case with **anthropology** or some branches of sociology, however.) There are several reasons for this. The natural sciences were of a higher status than the social sciences; ergo, if the social sciences used methods that those in the natural sciences did, that elite status might rub off on them. Another reason is that, with few exceptions, the departments were dominated by White men. In these early days, the voices of women and people of color were not heard. Accordingly, issues related to feminism or power disparities were not considered. It was the academy of European universities that dominated the development of thinking as colleges and universities developed in the U.S. But as I mentioned in the Preface, by the 1980s, various social science disciplines began to consider QR methods. Growth over the last thirty years and into the new millennium has been steady and pervasive.

Did You Know

? In the painting academy in France, there was also a hierarchy in painting, just as in research. The highest forms of painting were considered historical, religious, or mythological. Next came portraits. Landscapes and genre paintings followed. The lowest form of painting was the still life. You guessed it—views were dictated and dominated by White European men.

Today, you can find numerous examples of QR studies across the social sciences. Here are just a few I culled from various publications: Dawson and Hjorth (2012) used **narrative analysis** in their study of the succession process in a family business. White and Green (2011) used **case study** research to explore how social networks influence young people's access to employment and training. Lugosi et al. (2010) relied on **participant observation** and semi-structured interviews to explore hospitality and culture in bars in dilapidated buildings in Budapest. Their article is enhanced with wonderful visuals of some of the venues. You should get a chuckle out of the furniture constructed from reclaimed bathtubs. Matusik and Mickel (2011) employed a **grounded theory** approach in their study of users' experiences with connective technology. They briefly described the features of grounded theory. Their study used a traditional approach to data analysis and used a technique taken from traditional research: inter-coder reliability. For an alternative look at how grounded theory can be used, you can read stories of medical professionals and new technologies (Korica & Molloy, 2010). We learn about host-country nationals working in American companies in Romania from Caprar's (2011) ethnographic research. Although the prevailing wisdom is that we can understand this group based on knowledge of the local culture, Caprar's work illustrates that these workers are not always interchangeable with locals. He suggests that we need a more sophisticated view of culture. It is through an ethnographic eye (one type of QR) that we gain such insight. In Chapter 5, I explain case study, grounded theory, and other **research approaches**. Subsequently, I will discuss techniques qualitative researchers can use to gather data.

Some researchers face special challenges in developing their designs. Ozturk's (2011) study employed open-ended, unstructured, and probing interviews to study the sensitive topic of workplace discrimination in Turkey based on sexual orientation. As he dealt with an atypical population, he was faced with the problem of how to identify people for his study. He used a technique called **snowball sampling**. I will discuss this technique, as well as other ways to identify **participants** for a study, in Chapter 10. Elsbach (2009) studied creative workers who developed toy cars. What better than to use qualitative methods? Her engaging style makes for an interesting read, although I wish she had included some visuals. Manghani (2009) was interested in the topic of love messaging. He studied mobile phone messaging or *txting* through Japanese tanka poetry. Given the unusual nature of the problem, he was faced with a unique challenge. Rather than using a specific research technique, his research is informed by a philosophical postmodern viewpoint associated with QR. These are just a few of the numerous examples of the use of QR techniques in various disciplines published after 2000.

■ Quantitative or Qualitative?

A number of disciplines have considered whether QR is a viable alternative to QN and in what ways. In the field of comparative politics, we learn from Mahoney (2007b) that beginning in the 1990s, there was a wave of publications of a qualitative nature. Reporting from Sydney, Fitzpatrick (2011) commented that in the field of suicidology, there was tension between qualitative and quantitative approaches and that a growing number of researchers advocated for greater use of qualitative methods in the field. As with many fields, this first wave employed qualitative methodology as a kind of last resort. However, Mahoney (2007b) further asserted

that more recently, the advantages of QR have been accepted. "Students of comparative politics frequently turn to qualitative methods instead of or in *combination* with alternative techniques because they believe that qualitative methods are essential for addressing many substantive questions of interest" (p. 122).

Mahoney (2007a) used data from QR as a counterpoint to Munck and Snyder's (2007a, 2007b) work on the state of comparative politics. Munck and Snyder relied on large samples and data-driven research—basically, QN. In contrast, Mahoney used QR methodology. In his article, Mahoney described a system in which he identified relevant journals and articles and coded them as to research type. I was surprised to read, "I would caution that readers not jump to the conclusion that qualitative research dominates even the subfield journals, especially when we take into consideration issues of prestige among these journals (2007a, p. 34). He continued that "the most prestigious journals publish almost entirely quantitative work, while *Comparative Politics* publishes mostly qualitative articles" (2007a, p. 35). You might find the article interesting as well as Mahoney and Goertz's (2006) article that contrasted the two types of research.

■ How Are Qualitative and Quantitative Research Complementary?

Within the past few years, a number of researchers have moved toward combining QR and QN approaches. Some say yes—it is reasonable to include both in the same study. As Mahoney (2007a) suggested, a recent trend in the field is to combine QN and QR approaches. This combination has become known as **mixed-methods research**. Nielsen, Randall, and Christensen (2010) did just that in their study. Their work strongly emphasized the quantitative nature of the design and, in fact, relied on a highly structured observational study. In a study of gentrification-induced displacement among social services, de Verteuil (2011) used longitudinal numerical analysis and qualitative interviews in a multisite case study. Creswell (2011) and Teddlie and Tashakkori (2011)—all proponents of mixed-methods research—write about some controversies. In my experience, those who combine QN and QR often emphasize QN and briefly mention QR, almost as an afterthought. This is less true today than previously. I explore this idea in greater depth in Chapter 6.

While acknowledging that mixed-methods social research is acceptable, Howe (2011) investigated the relationship of mixed methods and conceptions of causation. He developed the idea that there are two kinds of causes: intentional and natural. He suggested that *intentional causation* is related to QR, while *natural causation* is related to traditions rooted in experimental research.

Westerman and Yanchar (2011) take us on an unusual pathway. They ask us to consider how quantitative methods can contribute to interpretive inquiry in psychology. In fact, the April 2011 issue of *Theory & Psychology* is devoted to this topic. The special issue addresses a number of dimensions. One is how QR can be informed by quantitative methodology. Morawski (2011) observed that the field of psychology currently asks for a détente rather than continued antagonism and warfare about which approach is better (p. 260). Other topics covered in this special issue have to do with **conversation analysis** (Westerman, 2011) and theoretical foundations of **subjectivity** (Højgaard & Søndergaard, 2011).

Brito, Ribeiro, and Machado (2011) concluded that "the best decision for the beginning researcher [in education] is indicated as joining four principles: balance, knowledge of the

multiple facets of reality, ability in articulation and discernment before the plurality of options." A sociologist, Patel (2011), argued that the old debates about the merits of either qualitative or quantitative approaches have been superseded by "the evolution of a creative, interdisciplinary combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches" (abstract). Feminists also weighed in on the topic. Westmarland (2001) concluded that there is no need for the dichotomy between the two approaches.

In addition to looking at published research, I explore views offered by bloggers. From Marta, a blogger in geography, we have the view that a particular method that is better or produces more desirable results is outdated and antiquated. Marta (2011) stated, "I hope that my generation of geographers can move past this outdated and rather pointless debate." From Mumbai, India, Bachwani-Paritosh (2011) has been posting a very interesting blog. A recent post addresses the need for unisex bathrooms on airplanes. Carr's (2011) blog is very interactive. He speaks about his thoughts on global change from a qualitative perspective. McGuire's (2011) blog is posted from New Zealand. In a post from September 2011, he sends you to some qualitative journals he discovered.

■ What Is Qualitative Research?

I have used the term *qualitative research* in a number of places already. In fact, the book's title uses the term. Do you know what it means? Let's try a simple activity. Before you read further, complete this sentence: "Qualitative research is . . . "

If you do this in a face-to-face class or an online class, you can share your responses with others. If you do it in the quiet of your home or office, you can look online as to what others have said.

Below, I provide definitions of QR offered by prominent authors in the field and those I found in my online search using three search engines.

Some definitions are very general, while others are specific. Some are associated with a particular discipline; others are more general. I organize these definitions along two dimensions: level of specificity and discipline. Here are some examples:

Level of Specificity—General, Specific, or Somewhere in Between

A standard reference book is *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. Edited by Denzin and Lincoln (2011), this book draws from numerous authors in the field. Here is their definition:

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. . . . This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3)

I have to admit that the definition seems somewhat cumbersome to me. The phrase "situated activity" seems obtuse.

Another widely used source of information about QR comes from the work of John Creswell, one of the early writers in the field. I take this definition from his book (2007) on the topic.

> Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action. (Creswell, 2007, p. 37)

This definition seems unduly long, although it contains many important components.

Berg and Lune (2011) stated that "qualitative research properly seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings." They continued: "[qualitative researchers are] most interested in how humans arrange themselves and their settings and how inhabitants of these settings made sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles, and so forth" (p. 8). In my view, this definition is quite limiting in its focus on a study of culture. Of course, some QR does look at culture through the lens of an ethnographer. But much of it takes a very different approach.

According to Anderson (2012), in her review of Yin's book on QR, QR offers multiple interpretations of the human events studied and considerable methodological variation.

I also consulted the web. I conducted a search using three search engines: Google, Bing, and DuckDuckGo. I searched for the term "qualitative research definition 2011." I looked at ten screens each for Google and Bing. DuckDuckGo adds new sites immediately, so it is not easy to tell how many you have looked at. I was surprised at the little overlap I found. I found some links on Bing that I had not seen on Google. Similarly, I found some on DuckDuckGo that were not on either of the other two. Here are some definitions that I found:

> Qualitative research is not simply the collecting of statistics, but focuses on reasoning and cultural and social factors, which are researched and then analysed. (MediaDictionary, 2011)

> Qualitative research is based on finding the opinions and attitudes of respondents rather than any scientifically measurable data. (Glossary of Marketing, 2011)

> Qualitative researchers aim to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior. (Wikipedia, 2011)

> Research that aims to understand the phenomenon of what is experienced by research subjects such as attitudes, perceptions, motivations, actions, etc., holistically, and by way of description in the form of words and language, in a particular context that naturally and by utilizing a variety of natural methods. (Deniborin, 2010)

Quantitative research involves the analysis and interpretation of numerical data, while qualitative research involves the analysis and interpretation of observational data. (Hamilton, 2011)

As you can see, many of the definitions I located on the Internet are very brief and somewhat incomplete.

Specific Discipline

I also decided to expand my search by examining specific disciplines.
From the nursing field:

Qualitative research is a type of scientific research which has its roots in philosophy and human sciences. (Nursing Planet, 2011)

From information systems:

Qualitative research involves the use of qualitative data, such as interviews, documents, and participant observation data, to understand and explain social phenomena. In Information Systems, there has been a general shift . . . away from technological to managerial and organizational issues, hence an increasing interest in the application of qualitative research methods. (Myers, 2011)

From education:

Research providing detailed narrative descriptions and explanations of phenomena investigated, with lesser emphasis given to numerical quantifications—methods used to collect qualitative data include ethnographic practices such as observing and interviewing. (Education.com, 2011)

It is a way of knowing in which a researcher gathers, organizes, and interprets information obtained from humans using his or her eyes and ears as filters. It often involves in-depth interviews and/or observations of humans in natural and social settings. It can be contrasted with quantitative research, which relies heavily on hypothesis testing, cause and effect, and statistical analyses. (Lichtman, 2013, p. 6)

From business:

Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Asian Societies, 2011)

From the law:

Qualitative research is a subjective form of research relying on the analysis of controlled observations of the researcher. (U.S. Legal, 2011)

From finance:

A type of market research, especially in the form of interviews or group discussions, that aims to find out people's attitudes or opinions about something, where the results cannot be shown in numbers. (Financial Times Lexicon, 2011)

From social work:

Qualitative research is referred to by a variety of terms, reflecting several research approaches. Field research is often used interchangeably with qualitative research to describe systematic observations of social behavior with no preconceived hypotheses to be tested (Rubin & Babbie, 1993). . . . Qualitative research is also referred to as naturalistic research (Greenhalgh & Taylor, 1997) or inquiry into everyday living. (McRoy, n.d.)

From psychology:

Hawes (n.d.) created an online qualitative research resources page. She includes a number of MegaSites with links and brief descriptions. In addition to this site, there are links to bibliographies, creating manuscripts, institutions, journals, methodology, social science, and software.

From speech and language:

Specifically, qualitative methods can be used "to understand the complexity of social phenomena through a set of systematic and interpretive practices designed to seek answers to questions that stress how social actions and social experiences are created and sustained" (Damico & Ball, 2010, p. 15). In other words, they can be used to situate the communicative lives of the children and the adults whom we serve in social and cultural contexts. (Hammer, 2011)

After completing this task, I found myself in a position similar to how I might feel if I had collected a lot of data through interviews. How could I organize what I had and come up with something meaningful? One way to do this is to look for common elements or **themes**.

■ A Working Definition

I have uncovered a wealth of information. In the definitions above, I identified some common elements. A number of researchers consider what is studied—human, cultural, or social interactions or behaviors. Another key element is that the settings are naturally occurring. The

role of the researcher in interpreting and generating meaning from the data is also important. The type of data collected is another key element.

Here is my working definition:

> QR is a way to study the social interactions of humans in naturally occurring situations. The researcher plays a critical role in the process by gathering data and making sense of or interpreting the phenomena that are observed and revealed.

What Makes Research Qualitative?

Moving from my definition, I am now able to determine what kinds of questions QR might answer. One type involves humans and their interactions. Think about the elderly woman who is going through beginning stages of Alzheimer's. What is she feeling? How does this affect her life and those around her? Or imagine a case worker's struggle in a new agency with clients who are disruptive or noncompliant. How does a new program the agency has put into place support this case worker's efforts? An organization discovers considerable unrest during downsizing. How does the cultural climate facilitate transitioning? Groups foment uprisings and are filmed on YouTube. How do these individuals react during tumultuous times? These kinds of questions focus on individuals or groups and the worlds in which they live and work. These are some of the types of questions to which QR is especially suited.

Another aspect of QR is that individuals are studied in their natural settings. The elderly woman, the agency, the organization, or the groups—all would be studied as they are, whether in their own homes, at a clinic, in a business, or online. Individuals would not be studied in a setting that was part of an experiment.

The researcher's role is critical in QR. It is the researcher who gathers and organizes data. It is the researcher who makes meaning from the data, who interprets the data, and ultimately who makes the world visible to others (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). Further, the **reflective researcher** acknowledges the role he or she plays and is reflective about that role. As such, then, the researcher's stance moves from one of objectivity to one of subjectivity.

Overview of Common Elements

I think you might find it helpful if I review some of the common elements that are often associated with various ways of doing QR.

- Its purpose is to understand and interpret the meaning of human interaction and social phenomena. This is in contrast to QN, which involves hypothesis testing and generalization.
- It considers questions that involve the *what* and *why* of human behavior. This is in contrast to those involving results.
- It is a study of humans in natural settings. This is in contrast to QN, which occurs in a laboratory, involves experiments, or surveys large groups of people.
- Its method is dynamic and fluid. As such, details of the collection and analysis of the data often evolve as the research progresses. This is in contrast to an advanced and detailed plan of research.

- It involves inductive thinking—movement from the specific to the general. This is in contrast to QN, which moves from the general to the specific.
- It looks at the whole of a situation rather than specifics. This is in contrast to the isolation and manipulation of variables.
- The role of the researcher is critical. It is through the researcher's eyes and ears that data are collected and analyzed. The researcher often takes a reflective stance. This is in contrast to a researcher's role of objectivity.
- Reality is constructed by the researcher. As such, there is not a single interpretation of reality but multiple interpretations. This is in contrast to the identification of an objective reality.
- It uses in-depth study, often of a small number of individuals or settings. It goes deep rather than broad. This is in contrast to studying large numbers.
- It involves a search for themes or a narrative story. Data are usually presented as words and/or pictures. This is in contrast to statistical analysis and tables.
- It encourages the author's voice in the context. This is in contrast to staying removed from the system (Bansal & Corley, 2011).
- It encourages presentation of findings in alternative styles. This is in contrast to a fixed method of presentation of results.

Additional Components

In my working definition, I included three critical components: study of human/social interaction; natural settings; and the researcher's role. You might also consider some additional components related to QR.

As you read and learn about the field, you will come to see that QR is not a single thing; however, we use the term as though it is. In fact, the term can be seen as an umbrella under which many ways of asking and answering questions can be used. This causes much confusion for those new to the field and also for those who have practiced it a long time. My emphasis in this book is to inform you about current practices and meanings. I caution you to check the dates of the journal articles and books you read, since viewpoints that were prevalent just a few years ago may no longer be in the mainstream now.

Qualitative researchers may be guided by a particular research approach. You might have read about an ethnographic approach. Borrowing from anthropology, ethnographers study the culture of an organization, a group, a community, or a religion. Or you may have encountered **phenomenology**. These researchers are interested in lived experiences of individuals. Some of the approaches have explicit processes and guidelines; others are somewhat general. In later chapters, I will talk in greater detail about various research approaches.

Whatever research approach is followed or whether a generic approach is used, the qualitative researcher gathers information from those studied. The most common ways to gather information are through interviews or observations. In later chapters, I will discuss these ways of gathering data, along with many others.

Another way to think about QR is based on the perspective and viewpoint of the researcher. Does the researcher support a **feminist** perspective, where issues of power and representation are considered? Is the researcher an activist, where issues of social change and politics are involved? Does the researcher take a **critical theorist** viewpoint? Does the

researcher adopt a pragmatic approach in which both qualitative and quantitative data are collected and used to answer questions?

Yet another way is to think about a group you intend to study. Are you interested in studying workers, those who are planning to retire, or elite athletes? Do you want to know more about children who live in rural areas or who have recently moved from rural to urban areas?

It is also helpful to examine what is *not* included in QR. It does not involve hypothesis testing, experiments, or statistical data. It is not useful for generalizing from samples to populations. It does not assume that the researcher remains objective. It does not involve independent or dependent variables—in fact, it does not involve variables at all.

■ The Growth of Qualitative Research

QR (specifically **ethnographic methods**) had long been used by anthropologists as they studied distant cultures. Some sociologists (especially the Chicago school) used **field methods** as they studied newly arriving immigrants to the United States. Some philosophers relied on methods of phenomenology and **hermeneutics** to study the lived experiences of individuals. But there was little cross-fertilization among these disciplines.

One field in which there is a considerable amount of human interaction is the field of education. Groups of individuals come together regularly to attend school. For many years, educators relied on the methods of the natural sciences as they studied education. Many experiments were conducted, data were collected using test scores, and hypotheses were tested.

It was toward the middle of the 1980s that educators ventured into the realm of QR. Most adopted ethnographic methods from anthropology for the study of schools and classrooms. In fact, *Qualitative Research for Education* (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) centered on ethnographic methods. The nursing profession found that grounded theory and phenomenology were useful in answering some of the questions in their field. In the 1990s, other social science disciplines experimented with using various **QR approaches**.

I vividly recall the **paradigm wars** of the 1980s (Gage, 1989). This was basically a fight against **positivism**. It was the **positivists** (the QN group) (and later, the **post-positivists**) who were being challenged by the **constructivists** or **interpretists**. This latter group represented QR. The issue related to **ontology** and **epistemology**—what is the nature of reality and how do we know it? The constructivists (many in the qualitative camp) believed that reality was constructed by the researcher and known through the researcher's lens. On the other hand, the positivists/post-positivists (mostly quantitative researchers) believed that there is an objective reality (or an approximation of that reality) out there, and researchers can know it by designing a study in such a way as to determine it. It seemed to me that you were in either one camp or the other. For me, I had to rethink my entire framework of what research was and how it was done. No longer were statistics and experimental research the best or only way to do things. Perhaps there were other ways to think about conducting research. In Chapter 7, Christine Brooks writes about her own orientation from a humanities viewpoint. For her, the qualitative-quantitative dichotomy was outside her frame of reference.

For many researchers who were trained as quantitative researchers, it was difficult to let go of the deeply held assumptions (whether explicit or implied) of what constituted good research. One solution was to aspire toward **triangulation**. A term taken from surveying, triangulation is a way to locate a point from the angles of three known points. In research, it came to be applied by using three known sources of data to verify or make credible data from a single source. Denzin (2010) described it as an "emerging fad" (p. 419) in the social sciences in these early times. But some traditional qualitative researchers (especially those applying mixed methods) use this concept.

During the 1980s and 1990s, critical theorists and **feminist researchers** struggled to acquire power for those who had been left out of the dialog and discussion (e.g., women, people of color, gays, and the poor). These newly emerging voices had a powerful impact on what was happening in the QR community.

Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) expanded the discussion to include two additional conflicts. They suggested that between 1990 and 2005 there were conflicts among post-positivists, constructivists, and critical theorists. In essence, they added critical theorists into the mix. I would also add **postmodernism** to this latter group. Critical theorists and **postmodernists** are concerned with the role of the researcher to a greater extent than others. In the humanities and the art world, **critical theory** is also an important topic. Witham and Bensimon (2012) discussed how contemporary (post-2000) teachers use different critical theories to interpret literature and art.

Before I get too far in my discussion, let me provide you with some simple definitions. A positivist believes that there is an objective reality that can be known (the ontology) by the researcher. A post-positivist believes that there is an approximation of an objective reality that can be known by the researcher. In both cases, the researcher's role is to remain objective so as not to influence that reality. A constructivist or interpretist, on the other hand, believes that a reality is constructed by the researcher, and because of that, the researcher's role is critical in such construction. Critical theorists and postmodernists derive their stance from several intellectual movements.[1] Critical theorists are concerned with a critique of culture and society. One idea associated with critical theorists is that they should improve the understanding of society. A postmodern critical theorist is concerned with the crisis of representation and rejects the idea of objectivity that positivists and post-positivists had. The role of the researcher is especially critical, then, as a researcher reflects about the politics of the research. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) speak of the embodied, collaborative, dialogic, and improvisational aspect of QR.

According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003), we are currently engaged in a third war—that between those who believe in **evidence-based** work and those who accept a mixed-methods, interpretive, or critical theory[2] viewpoint. I see a conflict between several groups: those who believe in the **gold standard** of research; those who adopt many varied and wide-ranging alternative qualitative approaches; and those who compromise with a mixed-methods pragmatic approach to conducting research. For me, these three ideas (evidence based, gold standard, and scientific) represent the same thing: a return to objectivity with little regard for the role of the researcher or the need to be inclusive and expand our dialog. Denzin (2010) urged that we extend the call for paradigm expansion and that we move toward a spirit of cooperation (p. 421). I agree with him. I recognize that these

arguments are a little difficult to understand, but they will become clearer as you learn more about the field.

Because there are different views of what constitutes good research, there are different expectations of various aspects of the research process. I will address some of these later, when I talk about the role of the researcher, the need for **reflexivity**, alternative forms of research presentation, and how data are collected and analyzed. What is clear to me, however, is that QR (in various forms) now plays a major role in the conduct of research in the social sciences.

■ Why Qualitative Research?

Packer (2011), in his thoughtful treatise on the science of QR, asked that we focus on why we should conduct QR. Although he might be overstating its impact somewhat, he suggested that "qualitative research has the potential to change our attitude of domination because it is sensitive to human forms of life in a way that traditional research cannot be" (location 203). Packer sees QR as a new way of conceptualizing social inquiry.

We should listen to Packer, as he reminded us that looking for objective observations about humans is not the same as studying humans as beings who live in a particular cultural and historical setting. He continued that it is not that objectivity is abandoned in favor of relativism. Rather, such a science would adopt a moral and epistemological pluralism. In a review of Michelangelo Antonioni's trilogy of films from the early 1960s (*L'Avventura, La Notte*, and *L'Eclisse*), Gariff (2012) compares Antonioni and Jackson Pollock. He concludes, "They opened the door for others to work in a more subjective and abstract manner and taught all of us new ways to see and understand art, ourselves, and the world in which we live" (p. 10). I contend that QR is moving in just this direction.

So, on a practical level, we conduct QR to answer certain kinds of questions that can better be answered in this way. On a political or moral level, we conduct QR to foster social change not through violence but ultimately by changing who we are.

Hopper (2011) suggested that by using QR, we can see how general forces affect specific circumstances. A more important point that he makes, I think, is that we ask questions that can't easily be studied using numbers. As I clarified in my working definition, QR focuses on the nature of social reality.

■ Comparing Qualitative and Quantitative Research

You should not be surprised that there have been various comparisons made between the two ways to do research. At the surface level, it should be apparent to you that quantitative researchers rely on numbers, while qualitative researchers use words and visuals. Accordingly, if you have numerical data, you can use statistics to test hypotheses. If you have words or visuals, you tend to interpret the data either by searching for common themes or by telling narratives. You may have read about qualitative researchers who choose to take their data and place it into categories and then report frequencies of occurrences of particular elements. However, this type of comparison is one that is at the direct

and obvious level. I think it results in superficial interpretation of the data. I like Mitchell's (2011) straightforward approach.

> The issue of qualitative versus quantitative methods is rooted first and foremost in the character of the phenomena investigated and not in an investigator's methodological preferences. If the phenomenon under investigation is non-quantitative, then it cannot be studied successfully by attempting to use quantitative methods because trying to impose quantitative concepts upon qualitative phenomena misrepresents them. (p. 139)

Another way you can think about comparing the two types is to develop a list of elements and then compare those for qualitative elements, for quantitative elements, or for a combination of the two. Neill (2007) offered such a comparison. Although Neill's work is dated 2007, it reflected thinking from earlier times. Siegle's (n.d.) table is somewhat broader and informative. It compares two types of paradigms: positivist (quantitative) and naturalist (qualitative). One more table might help you see how comparisons between QR and QN are made. The International School of Prague's (2010) psychology course in qualitative theory and practice compared a positivist paradigm with a phenomenological paradigm.

Here is my example:

Table 1.1 Comparison of Qualitative and Quantitative Methods of Research

Element	Qualitative	Quantitative
Purpose of research	Describe and understand human and social phenomena	Test hypotheses; provide descriptive information
Types of research questions	Why and what	How many and who
Assumptions about the world	Subjective interpretation	Objective reality
Setting	Natural	Experimental; laboratory
Role of researcher	Key role; reflective	Outside of the system; neutral
Size of group studied	Tends to be smaller; nonrandom	Tends to be larger; randomly selected
Selection of group	Purposeful sampling; snowball sampling; volunteers	Random or stratified sampling
Variables	Study of the whole rather than specific variables	A few variables studied; some manipulated; some controlled
Type of data collected	Interview; observational; visual	Outcomes; scores
Type of analysis	Thematic or narrative	Statistical
Presentation format	Experimental format—may include alternatives such as performance	Traditional format

NOTE: Table omits mixed methods.

■ Theoretical and Philosophical Foundations of Qualitative Research

Since *qualitative research* is a general term with many meanings, I cannot directly state what its theoretical and philosophical foundations are. QR is not designed to test theory. It moves from an inductive approach rather than deductive. Its goal is to understand the *why* of individuals in a social world. However, one tradition associated with QR—grounded theory—is designed to generate theory from the data. In practice, the theories that emerge are rather weak. Robin (2011) describes how theory and concepts can be integrated and woven into the literature at the conclusion of a qualitative study.

Some approaches to QR have a philosophical base. For example, phenomenology is based in theories developed by Husserl. I will say more about this in Chapter 5. Other ways of conceptualizing QR are theoretical in nature. For example, we can think of a **feminist theory** or a postmodern theory of research. These are discussed in Chapter 6.

We can learn again from the writings of Packer (2011). He provided in-depth discussions of emancipatory research from the viewpoint of Habermas. He also developed information about Bourdieu's reflexive sociology. Most important, he elucidated the work of Foucault, whom he calls the hero of his text. I leave you with Foucault's three central questions as espoused by Packer: How are we constituted as **subjects** of our own knowledge? How are we constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations? How are we constituted as moral subjects of our own actions? (location 412).

■ What About Validity?

Validity is a topic about which so much has been written, and that causes much confusion. As times and conceptions have changed, so too have ways in which validity has been addressed. We can think about judging or evaluating and criteria for doing so. I talk about this topic extensively in Chapter 14.

Validity. How can I know that this research is any good, or how can I believe it, or how can I trust it? From the time QR began to take hold in the 1980s or so, this question has been raised. Traditionally, the internal validity of a **research design** could be accomplished by designing an experiment and controlling for various factors that might affect the study. For example, if I administer a particular drug to control blood pressure, I would want to make sure that I took into consideration other things that might affect blood pressure (such as changes in diet or exercise). If I had a true experimental design, then I could say my study had *internal validity* if I controlled for these other variables.

Now, another part of validity has to do with whether I can say that the results could be applied to other situations than my own. This type of validity is called *external validity*. In traditional research, a design is said to have external validity if the sample on which it is done is random. In my example about drugs and blood pressure, I would need to make sure that I didn't select a group that was biased in some way.

Other factors also affect validity of the study. These include objectivity of the researcher, reliability of how variables are measured, and so on.

Initially, some qualitative researchers tried to be responsive to these concerns. They recognized that their designs would not have the controls that traditional designs had. For example, researchers were part of the system and so, by design, not objective. Variables were not controlled; in fact, most QR did not consider separate variables but looked at things as a whole. Initial responses were to develop parallel criteria to account for validity. This group of individuals came from a perspective called *post-positivism*. A post-positivist recognized some limitations of positivism but tried to design studies as close to this viewpoint as possible. Another group of researchers took a different position. They can loosely be grouped into the category *postmodernism*. For the latter group, adopting criteria that were parallel to those of traditional researchers did not make sense. Their research—in fact, their worldview—was fundamentally different from the **traditionalists**, and so the criteria were inappropriate.

Personally, I lived through this time period. My own background and training was in experimental design and statistics. I thought I knew which designs were the best. I knew how to control for extraneous variables. So did all of my colleagues. But QR had arrived. Some of us came to it via eye-opening experiences about how QN might not be suitable for answering all questions we had. For me, as I studied family therapy, I came to see that alternatives to experiments and statistics were needed; but that is another story for another time.

That these two umbrella groups (post-positivists and postmodernists) existed with very different worldviews led to something called the *paradigm wars*. Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011) remind us that in the early days—mid-1990s or so—"we focused on the contention among various research paradigms for legitimacy and intellectual and paradigmatic hegemony" (p. 97). During that time, there were essentially two camps—the positivists and post-positivists constituted one group, while those in the postmodern camp were the other group. Post-positivists tried to fit into the mold and so looked for ways that were parallel to traditional research, while postmodernists discarded these ideas and said they were coming from some other place. Each camp wanted to occupy a place of legitimacy. What were they to do? A word or two about these two camps. While there were many differences between the two, the most important ones were in three areas: What about the nature of reality or what we can know (*ontology*)? What about the process of how we come to know? What is the relationship between the knower (researcher) and what is known (*epistemology*)? What about the ways of knowing? How do we seek new knowledge (*methodology*)?

What does all of this have to do with validity in 2013? While the wars have ended for most people and mixed methods (joining both QR and QN) have been adopted by others, the question still remains: How can I know that this research is any good, or how can I believe it, or how can I trust it? What are the criteria for judging and assessing the worth of QR?

The question has become much more complicated today. In fact, Northcote (2012) states that over one hundred sets of qualitative criteria have been identified (Stige, Malterud, and Midtgarden, 2009, agree). So how do you, as a student in the field, know what to do? One option is to apply some criteria; but if so, which ones? I know you want this to be a simple answer, but it can't be. One reason why is that different disciplines have different expectations. According to Northcote (2012), "The challenge of how to assess qualitative research is evident in many fields including psychology . . . , engineering . . . , health . . . and industrial marketing" (p. 102).

Further, different QR approaches or designs have different criteria. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010) state that validity for **autoethnography** "means that a work seeks verisimilitude" and evokes a lifelike experience for the reader (para. 34). Rouse (2012), a European psychology student, posts a detailed and insightful blog. She recommends Yardley's (2011) core principles—sensitivity to context, commitment and rigor, coherence and transparency, and impact and importance. Those conducting participatory research face similar dilemmas of inappropriate evaluative criteria (Bergold & Thomas, 2012, para. 78). On the other hand, those using grounded theory (Hardman, 2012) are more likely to apply traditional criteria.

In order to illustrate current practice, I examined how several authors handled validity related to their particular research. The following are illustrations drawn from published research in *Qualitative Inquiry* for 2012:

Jewkes (2012), in a study of prison research using autoethnography, introduces the study thus: "There is an unspoken understanding that if we disclose the emotions that underpin and inform our work, our colleagues will question its 'validity' and perhaps even our suitability to engage effectively in criminological research" (p. 63). She remains silent on the topic after this remark.

Mikecz (2012), in his study of interviewing elites, commented that

> It is impossible to achieve perfect reliability and validity, although they are very important in social science due to the often-ambiguous nature of social constructions. . . . In qualitative research, the incorporation of rigor as well as subjectivity into the research process raises difficulties in developing validity standards. . . . Creswell . . . defines validation as the compilation of "bits and pieces of evidence to formulate a compelling whole." . . . However, evidence is not the equivalent of truth and objectivity. Because life as we live it is not static enough to allow for this kind of certainty: It is much more fluid, contextual, and relational. . . . Because we cannot separate ourselves from what we know, our subjectivity is an integral part of our understanding of ourselves, of others, and of the world around us. Thus, validation in qualitative research is a "judgment of trustworthiness or goodness of a piece of research." (p. 491)

I am not sure what he means by perfect validity, since he seems to draw away from the concept as he talks about the relationship of the knower to what is known.

Razon and Ross (2012), in their study about alliance building while interviewing in Israel comment on validity:

> We acknowledge that discussions about the collaboration between researcher and participant are not new in academic research, particularly scholarship informed by feminist, postcolonial, and science and technology studies' theories. Patty Lather . . . for example, argues eloquently about the importance of participants taking an active role in the collection and publication of data, suggesting that the absence of their voice creates issues of validity in qualitative research. (p. 496)

Holliday's (2012) research concerned interaction with an executive in a large British institution. With regard to validity, she writes, "The rigor and validity of the research thus shifts to

a management of subjectivity in which researchers become conscious of their presence and use disciplines to deal with it" (p. 506). Managing subjectivity seems to be her central concern.

What can we learn from these snippets? There is a lack of clarity on what is meant by *validity.* There is lack of agreement on what is meant as well. Most authors do not address the topic. When they do, they seem to be vague or unclear.

Let me make my position clear on the topic: Validity criteria associated with traditional QN are inappropriate in today's understanding of QR. Review boards and other agencies are not necessarily the official arbiters of suitable or appropriate criteria. Criteria differ depending on one's own sensibilities and worldview. Criteria also differ depending on one's academic discipline. At times, you may find yourself out of step with others. I think that is a good thing. Here are some things that I find helpful when I read journal articles; to me, they speak about the worth of a project: (1) acknowledging that those we study are not just subjects or samples, but real people with real needs, ambitions, and foibles, and (2) involving oneself in all aspects of the study; this is critical for good QR. Thus it would not make sense to reflect concern about being too subjective or not being sufficiently objective.

Some pet peeves that irk me when I read an article include (1) apologizing because a sample is too small or not representative; this makes no sense, since the goal of QR is to describe, understand, and take action. It is not to test hypotheses or draw conclusions; and (2) seeking rigor in terms of data interpretation, as this is also inappropriate. Thus it would not make sense to look for ways to affirm the data that a researcher collects by asking others to agree with an interpretation.

So it has come to this. I adopt a position based on my own view of the world. Rigid, traditionalist criteria do not work for me. My worldview says that a piece of research meets my standards if the topic is important, the method used makes sense, the information provided about the study is sufficiently convincing, and new knowledge has been gained and/or action can be taken for the common good. The study can be about one or many individuals, groups, or organizations; it can be presented in written form or in a play; it can identify important themes or tell a story. All are possible.

Sometimes we just do research because we are required to by the nature of our job or our educational requirements. We just want to get it out of the way. But other times, we do research to make a difference in the lives of others and ultimately in our own lives.

I hope you will find the way that works for you. My intention is to help you on that journey.

CHECK YOURSELF

- Many disciplines use QR. Examples of QR are offered from a variety of disciplines in the social sciences
- Some disciplines combine QR and QN. Although some researchers use either QR or QN, others adopt a pragmatic approach, combining both in the same study.
- There are many definitions of QR. They differ in terms of how specific they are and in terms of the discipline. My definition combines many elements: QR is a way to study the social interactions of humans in naturally occurring situations. The researcher plays a critical role in the process by gathering data and making sense of or interpreting the phenomena that are observed and revealed.
- Common elements of QR include understanding human interactions in natural settings, the dynamic nature of the process, an inductive approach, and the important role of researcher.

- Table 1.1 highlights the major differences between QR and QN.
- There are different positions about validity. In part, they are connected to whether the researcher adopts a post-positivist viewpoint, an interpretist viewpoint, or the viewpoint of a critical theorist. The discussion is ongoing about what makes for good QR and who should decide about the criteria.

KEY DISCUSSION ISSUES

1. What are examples of the types of research conducted in different disciplines? How can you characterize the type of research you have just read about?

2. QR and QN seem to be different. In what ways can both be used in one study? Does that seem incompatible to you?

3. What is a good working definition of QR? What are three key elements? Are there differences by discipline?

4. What additional elements are also found in QR?

5. Why might you use QR?

6. What are key comparisons between QR and QN?

MODULE 1A

Developing a Blog

Begin a blog about being a student of QR. This can be a group project or one you do alone. Write in the first person. Include some information about yourself. Write your thoughts about QR.

Here is one way to get a blog started. Go to http://www.blogger.com. You first need to create an account on blogger.com. Choose a template from the blogger homepage and follow the directions. That's all there is to it.

MODULE 1B

Identifying Key Elementws of Qualitative Research

Working with two others, identify key elements of QR. Narrow your separate lists so that you construct one master list.

Then select two articles to review. Identify one article from a recent issue of *Qualitative Inquiry*. Identify a second article from a recent issue of the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*. If you use the Student Study Site, I have selected articles for you to use.

Read each article to determine whether and to what extent the key elements you identified are included in each article. What other elements did you find? Comment on the relationship between the qualitative and the quantitative component in the mixed-methods article.

NOTES

1. Critical theory was originally associated with the "Frankfurt School," which described thinkers associated with the Institute for Social Research founded in 1923 in Frankfurt, Germany. Theodor Adorno, Erich Fromm, and Herbert Marcuse were prominent in the group.

2. Critical theory has been linked with art and creative research. The Pacific Northwest College of Art is accepting candidates for a master of arts in critical theory and creative research. It looks at the intersection of art, theory, and research. More information can be found at http://www.pnca.edu.

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