



Introduction

The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research

Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln

The global community of qualitative inquiry is midway between two extremes, searching for a new middle, moving in several different directions at the same time. How to create a new family of terms for a new critical inquiry, terms slip and slide, fall over one another. What do we mean by research, inquiry, critical, social justice, transformative, dialogic, reflexive, participatory, emancipatory, narrative, resistance love, loss, praxis, rigor, and writing as a way of being in the world (Cannella, 2015; Dimitriadis, 2016; Kamberelis, Dimitriadis, & Welker, Chapter 31, this volume; MacLure, 2015; Pillow, 2015)? Writing framed around acts of activism and resistance (Madison, 2010, 2012). How do we move forward? What is the place of a new edition of the *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* in this project?

What is the role of critical qualitative research in a historical present when the need for social justice has never been greater? Should we even be using the word *research*? Would the word *inquiry* be better, but then what does inquiry refer to (Dimitriadis, 2016; MacLure, 2015, p. 103)? This is a historical present that cries out for emancipatory visions, for visions that inspire transformative inquiries, and for inquiries that can provide the moral authority to move people to struggle and resist oppression. The pursuit of social justice within a transformative paradigm challenges prevailing forms of inequality, poverty, human oppression, and injustice.

The fields of qualitative inquiry and qualitative research are in transition (Dimitriadis, 2016; Torrance, 2016). Postinterpretive paradigms are on the horizon (Kuntz, 2015).¹ Older paradigms are being reconfigured. Hybrid paradigms are emerging alongside new geographies of knowledge and new decolonizing epistemologies. The ontological turn in social theory leads to alternative ontologies of counting (Lather, 2016) and the inventive uses of statistics for strategic, indigenous interventions. Who has the right to observe and count whom, and what does counting mean? New global communities of interpretive practice span the globe, stretching from North to South, East to West (see Coburn, 2015; Steinmetz, 2005; Walter & Anderson, 2013; Wyly, 2009). The field of qualitative research is on the move and moving in several different directions at the same time.

The methodological struggles of the 1970s and 1980s, fights over the very existence of qualitative research while part of a distant past, are very much alive in the second decade of the new millennium. They are present in the tenure battles that are waged every year for junior faculty when their qualitative research is criticized for not being scientific. They are alive in the offices of granting agencies where only mixed-methods studies are funded. In the emerging new paradigm war, “every overtly social justice-oriented approach to research . . . is threatened with de-legitimization by the government-sanctioned, exclusivist assertion of positivism . . . as the ‘gold standard’ of educational research” (Wright, 2006, pp. 799–800). The reinvigorated evidence-based research movement, with its fixed standards and guidelines for conducting and evaluating qualitative inquiry, seeks total domination: One shoe fits all (Erickson, Chapter 2, this volume; Cannella & Lincoln, Chapter 4, this volume; Lincoln, 2010).

The heart of the matter turns on issues surrounding the politics and ethics of evidence. Evidence-based guidelines reinforce support for postpositivist discourse, leading some to even call for a strategic positivism. This recalls the use of quasi-statistics (frequencies, percentages) by an earlier generation of participant observers who counted and cross-tabulated observations, in an effort to make their work more palatable to positivist colleagues (see Clarke, Friese, & Washburn, 2015, p. 37; Lather, 2013).

In this introductory chapter, we define the field of qualitative research, then navigate, chart, and review the recent history of qualitative research in the human disciplines. This will allow us to locate this handbook and its contents within their historical moments. These historical moments, as we noted in the Preface, are somewhat artificial. They are socially constructed, quasi-historical, and overlapping conventions. Nevertheless, they permit a “performance” of developing ideas.² They also facilitate an increasing sensitivity to and sophistication about the pitfalls and promises of ethnography and qualitative research. A conceptual framework for reading the qualitative research act as a multicultural, gendered process is presented.

We then provide a brief introduction to the chapters, concluding with a brief discussion of qualitative research. We also discuss the threats to qualitative human subject research from the methodological conservatism movement, which was noted in our Preface. We use the metaphor of the bridge to structure what follows. This volume provides a bridge between historical moments, politics, the decolonization project, research methods, paradigms, and communities of interpretive scholars.

Twenty-First-Century Interpretive Communities of Practice³

This new century is characterized by multiple discourses, by new ways of maneuvering between positivism, postpositivism, critical theory, constructionism, poststructuralism, participatory models of inquiry, and the new posts (see Guba, Lincoln, & Lynham, Chapter 5, this volume). While there has been a remarkable growth in different perspectives, there is unity under the “interpretive, performance paradigm,” from autoethnography to postcolonial discourse analysis, from symbolic interactionism, to situational and constructionist versions of grounded theory, from ethnodrama, and ethnotheatre, to postphenomenology, to critical theory, to new versions of standpoint theory, to materialist, antiracist, indigenous, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) liberatory social justice discourses (Clark et al., 2015, pp. 38, 40, 47; Walter & Anderson, 2013). This unity represents the “globalizing acceptance of qualitative inquiry, in its many forms. Critical qualitative inquiry is now an integral part of an international, interpretive public social science discourse” (see Clark et al., 2015, p. 37; also Burawoy, 2005, p. 511; Knoblauch, 2014).

Five-Figured Spaces

Kamberelis et al. (Chapter 31, this volume) propose five basic figured worlds of qualitative inquiry. (Each figured world is dynamic and evolving. There is no great chain of being operating.) A figured world is an interpretive community of practice, with shared understandings. These five worlds involve assumptions concerning knowledge, research questions, relations between subjects and objects, reality, and language. They give them familiar labels: (1) positivist (objectivism), (2) interpretive (modernism), (3) skepticism, praxis (critical), (4) power-knowledge (poststructural), and (5) ontological (postqualitative, postmaterialism). These figured worlds map onto the Guba, Lincoln, and Lynham chapter (Chapter 5, this volume) five-paradigm model (positivism, postpositivism, critical theory, constructivism, participatory-postmodern), which combines ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions (pp. 98–102).

The Kamberelis et al. five-figured space model, like the Guba et al. paradigm framework, travels across and into uncharted spaces, a Figured World 6, a new post-post? The models mark the importance of using research tools to answer concrete questions (World 1), in specific ethnographic spaces (World 2), while critically engaging praxis and dialogue (World 3), language and discourse (World 4), and the effects of materiality, affect, and performance (World 5) and imagining new becomings, returns, new departures, and detours (World 6). This new world will be informed by postcolonial, indigenous, transnational, global, and the multiple realities made possible through new digital technologies (Markham, Chapter 29, this volume).

The Blurring of Discourses and Borders

The QUAN/QUAL divide is blurring; perhaps it is time to give up the war (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 313). Radical feminists are using biostatistics and pursuing biosocial studies. Poststructuralists and posthumanists are interrogating the underlying assumptions and practices that operate in the era of big data, digital technologies, the data sciences, software analytics, and the diverse practices of numeracy (de Freitas, Dixon-Roman, & Lather, 2016). Alternative ontologies of number and subversive uses of statistics question the kinds of computational practices that saturate everyday life (de Freitas et al., 2016). As lines blur, traditionalists dig in, eschewing the new, calling for a return to the Chicago school classics, a return to neopositivist or postpositivist traditional ethnographic methods (Clarke et al., 2015, p. 40).

There are new international associations: International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry,⁴ Contemporary Ethnography Across the Disciplines (CEAD),⁵ the Qualitative Health Research Conference, The Qualitative Methods (QM) conference, The Qualitative Analysis Conference, and Advances in Qualitative Methods (see *FQS*, 2005, 6(3)), to list but a few. There has been a wide-scale legitimization of interpretive poststructural research across the curricula of the social sciences, humanities, professional education, health sciences, communications, education, computer and information science, military, science education, and applied linguistics. This has been accompanied by the development of sophisticated participatory, community, and cooperative action discourses, as well as critical indigenous decolonizing interventions (see Kovach, Chapter 9, this volume; Torre, Stout, Manoff, & Fine, Chapter 22, this volume).

Neoliberal discourses attempt to scientize qualitative approaches through evidence-based research efforts, which extend into graduate training and beyond (see below). A strong transnational critical Bourdieusian ethnographic tradition pushes back, through the journal *Ethnography*. This conversation has major centers in France, the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany (Clarke et al., 2015, p. 40). Keyan Tomaselli carries this transnational pushback to South Africa through his leadership in indigenous scholarship at the University of KwaZulu-Natal,

where he is director of the Centre for Communication, Media, and Society and editor of *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies*.

The International Association for Contemporary Ethnography Across the Disciplines (ACEAD) is a Southern Hemisphere conference informed by a Kaupapa M ori worldview of “research.” ACEAD offers a home for qualitative researchers “who draw upon indigenous forms of knowledge to enliven, enrich, and inform current dominant, experimental, and emerging forms of the ethnographic project” (see http://cead.org.nz/Site/Ethnography_conference/Association_for_CEAAd/default.aspx).

The newly formed Forum of Critical Chinese Qualitative Research of the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry extends this global project to China, to include the indigenization of critical Chinese qualitative research, the establishment and advancement of curricula on critical Chinese qualitative research, and the presence of critical Chinese qualitative research in the global context. A more qualitative research focus is found in the Korean Association for Qualitative Research (<http://www.aqr.org.uk/dir/view.cgi?ident=researchpacrok>), as well as in the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology (<http://www.jasca.org/onjasca-e/frame.html>) and the Japanese Society of Ethnology (see also Liu, 2011). Alejandra Martinez and Aldo Merlino organized I Post Congreso Argentina in Cordoba, October 2 to 3. In total, 550 delegates from 13 countries of Latin America presented papers at the congress, which was organized by the National Council of Research and Technology of Argentina (CIES-CONICE-TyUNIC) and University of Siglo, 21 of Cordoba, Argentina. The congress celebrated the 10th anniversary of the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry.

The Global Science Tent

The social science tent has gotten bigger, or there are now many different versions of what is science. Eisenhart (2006) proposes a model of qualitative science that is interpretive (Geertz, 1973) and practical. After Flyvbjerg (2001, 2011), she wants a science that matters, a science based on common sense, focused on values and power, relevant to the needs of ordinary citizens and policy makers. There are related calls for local science and for new ontologies and epistemologies (critical realism), indigenous science, interpretive science, posthuman and postmaterialist science, de-colonizing sciences, science as a socially situated practice, and science based on feminist standpoint methodologies (Harding, 2005). Burawoy (2005, pp. 511–512) calls for a policy-oriented, nonelitist, organic public social science. Here the scholar collaborates with local communities of practice, neighborhood associations, and labor and social justice movements. These alternatives to traditional positivist science improve the status of qualitative inquiry in the current political environment. They offer strategic forms of resistance to the narrow, hegemonic science-based research (SBR) framework. It is no longer possible to talk about a monolithic model of science. The mantle of authority has been tarnished.

History, Politics, and Paradigms

To better understand where we are today and to better grasp current criticisms, it is useful to return to the so-called paradigm⁶ wars of the 1980s, which resulted in the serious crippling of quantitative research in education. Critical pedagogy, critical theorists, and feminist analyses fostered struggles to acquire power and cultural capital for the poor, non-Whites, women, and gays (Gage, 1989). A legacy of the 1980s paradigm wars was a ready-made institutional apparatus that privileged a resurgent postpositivism, involving experimentalism, mixed methodologies, and the intrusion of the government into the spaces of research methods (Lather, 2004).⁷

These institutional structures converged when neoliberalism, postpositivism, and the audit-accountability culture took aim on education and schooling. The interrelationships between these structures are complex and by no means well understood. Clearly, the financial-auditing mechanism has been substantively and technically linked with the methodology of accountability (Skrla & Scheurich, 2004). Neoliberals added one more piece to their puzzle when they understood that with a knowledge-based economy, there was a need to produce better educated workers for the global economy. The watchwords: *audits*, *efficiency*, *high-stakes assessment*, *test-based accountability*, and *SBR* (see Spooner [Chapter 40] and Cheek [Chapter 13], this volume). It was only a matter of time before this apparatus would take aim at qualitative research and create protocols for evaluating qualitative research studies.

The Post-1980s Paradigm War Redux

Charles Teddlie and Abbas Tashakkori's (2003) history is helpful here. They expand the time frame of the 1980s war to embrace at least three paradigm wars, or periods of conflict: the postpositivist-constructivist war against positivism (1970–1990)⁸; the conflict between competing postpositivist, constructivist, and critical theory paradigms (1990–2005); and the recent conflict between evidence-based methodologists and the mixed-methods, interpretive, and critical theory schools (2005–present).⁹

According to Gage (1989), during the 1980s, the paradigm wars resulted in the demise of quantitative research in education, a victim of attacks from anti-naturalists, interpretivists, and critical theorists. Ethnographic studies flourished. The cultural appropriateness of schooling, critical pedagogy, and critical theorist and feminist analyses fostered struggles for power and cultural capital for the poor, non-Whites, women, and gays (Gage, 1989). (Gage imagined two alternative paradigms, pragmatism and Popper's piecemeal social engineering.)

Egon Guba's (1990) *The Paradigm Dialog* signaled an end to the 1980s wars. Postpositivists, constructivists, and critical theorists talked to one another, working through issues connected to ethics, field studies, praxis, criteria, knowledge accumulation, truth, significance, graduate training, values, and politics. By the early 1990s, there was an explosion of published work on qualitative research; handbooks and new journals appeared. Special interest groups committed to particular paradigms appeared, some with their own journals.¹⁰

The second paradigm conflict occurred within the mixed-methods community and involved disputes "between individuals convinced of the 'paradigm purity' of their own position" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003a, p. 7). Purists extended and repeated the argument that quantitative and qualitative methods and postpositivism and the other "isms" cannot be combined because of the differences between their underlying paradigm assumptions. On the methodological front, the incompatibility thesis was challenged by those who invoked triangulation as a way of combining multiple methods to study the same phenomenon (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003, p. 7; but see Flick, Chapter 19, this volume). This ushered in a new round of arguments and debates over paradigm superiority.

A soft, apolitical pragmatic paradigm emerged in the post-1990 period. Suddenly, quantitative and qualitative methods became compatible, and researchers could use both in their empirical inquiries (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). Proponents made appeals to a "what works" pragmatic argument, contending that "no incompatibility between quantitative and qualitative methods exists at either the level of practice or that of epistemology . . . there are thus no good reasons for educational researchers to fear forging ahead with 'what works'" (Howe, 1988, p. 16). Of course, what works is more than an empirical question. It involves the politics of evidence.

This is the space that evidence-based research (SBR) entered. It became the battleground of the third war, "the current upheaval and argument about 'scientific' research in the scholarly world of education" (C. Clark & Scheurich, 2008; Scheurich & Clark, 2006, p. 401). Enter

Teddlie and Tashakkori's third moment: Mixed methods and evidence-based inquiry meet one another in a soft center. C. Wright Mills (1959) would say this is a space for abstracted empiricism. Inquiry is cut off from politics. Biography and history recede into the background. Technological rationality prevails. The watchwords: *audits, efficiency, high-stakes assessment, test-based accountability, and SBR.*

The Third Moment and the New Paradigm Dialogues

Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003, p. ix) use the term *third methodological moment* to describe an epistemological position that evolved out of the discussions and controversies associated with the 1980s paradigm wars. The third moment mediates quantitative and qualitative disputes by finding a third or middle ground. Extending Teddlie and Tashakkori, there are in fact two distinct two versions of the third moment. There is the mixed-methods version of the moment, and there is a somewhat more radical position. This is the version that endorses paradigm proliferation, a version anchored in the critical interpretive social science traditions (Donmoyer, 2006).

Version One: In the first version of the third moment, incompatibility and incommensurability theses are rejected. Ironically, as this discourse evolved, the complementary strengths thesis emerged and is now accepted by many in the mixed-methods community. Here is where history starts to be rewritten. That is, multiple paradigms can be used in the same mixed-methods inquiry (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003, p. 23). At the same time, the mixed- or multiple-methods approach gained acceptance. This seemed to extend the triangulation arguments of the 1970s. Thus, the demise of the single theoretical and/or methodological paradigm was celebrated (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003, p. 24; but see Flick, Chapter 19, this volume).

For the mixed-methods advocates, the residues of the first paradigm war are positive and negative. The demise of the incompatibility thesis, as it applied to methods and paradigms, was "a major catalyst in the development of the mixed methods as a distinct third methodological moment" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). Regrettably, for the mixed-methods movement, a lingering negative legacy of the 1980s wars is the tendency of students and graduate programs to still consider themselves as QUALS or QUANS. The mixed-methods discourse also introduced complex discussions involving design typologies, logistics, validity, data, standards, inferences, and findings that can be generalized from studies that combine quantitative (QUAN) and qualitative (QUAL) methodologies. It was as if inquiry was disconnected from content, method prevailed, and issues of justice or of doing science that matters receded into the background.

Symonds and Gorard go so far as to call for the death of mixed methods, hoping that this death will lead to the rebirth of research as a craft (Symonds & Gorard, 2008, p. 17; 2010). Flick (Chapter 19, this volume) also questions the future of mixed-methods research:

The fashion and attraction of mixed methods will come to an end once funders, researchers, publishers, and finally its protagonists realize that it is less a solution to all kinds of problems but just another methodological approach with limits and weaknesses. One reason for such an insight can be the overrating of such a concept—who is sitting in review committees in medical sciences, for example, is confronted with a growing number of proposals that include qualitative research as part of a mixed-methods approach, although the knowledge about this kind of research is very superficial. In the long run, this may lead to the insight that, if combinations of methods are necessary, this should be done on more solid ground such as a developed concept of triangulation could provide. That would require that the concept of triangulation is further developed more offensively and propagated. [p. XXX]

Version Two: A third formation within the third moment. This is the space primarily filled by the many branches of the global interpretive community. Scholars in this space are working in three directions at the same time. On one hand, they are critically engaging and critiquing the SBR movement. They are emphasizing the political and moral consequences of the narrow views of science that are embedded in the movement (St. Pierre & Roulston, 2006). They are asking questions about the politics of evidence, about how work can be done for social justice purposes.

A second group of scholars celebrates paradigm proliferation (Donmoyer, 2006) and the profusion of interpretive communities. They do not necessarily endorse the incompatibility theses that are so important for the mixed-methods community. They understand that each community has differing interpretive criteria. This discourse functions as a firewall of sorts against the narrow view of nonpositivism held by SBR authors.

Still a third group of scholars is resisting the implementation of narrow views of ethics, human subject review boards, institutional review boards (IRBs), informed consent, and biomedical models of inquiry (see Christians, Chapter 3, this volume). Many campus-level IRBs attempt to manage qualitative research. This interferes with academic freedom; that is, IRB panels not only regulate who gives informed consent but also make stipulations concerning SBR research design and researcher-subject relationships.

Kvale (2008) and Brinkmann and Kvale (2008) observe that for the qualitative community, there is often a tendency to “portray qualitative inquiry as inherently ethical, or at least more ethical than quantitative research” (p. 10; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008, p. 262). They call this qualitative ethic—*that is, the inclination to see research within ethical terms and to assert that it is more ethical*. The dangers with qualitative ethic are twofold. It can lead to an uncritical romanticizing of qualitative research. At the same time, it can direct attention away from the ways in which qualitative inquiry—focus groups, open-ended interviewing, ethnography—is used to sell products in the consumer marketplace.

Performance, Affect, and the New Materialisms

Within the interpretive tradition, there is a fourth formation. It represents a break from earlier traditions and moves from posthumanist to nonrepresentational theories (Vannini, 2015), to relational materialisms, to alternative ontologies of number and new regimes of counting and computation, multiple versions of the nonhuman turn (Clough, 2016–2017; de Freitas et al., 2016).

A rupture: Coole and Frost (2010) describe three themes that frame this discourse:

First is an ontological reorientation that is posthumanist in the sense that it conceives of matter itself as exhibiting agency. Second are biopolitical, and bioethical issues concerning the status of life and of the human. Third, the new scholarship reengages political economy emphasizing the relationship between the material details of everyday life and broader geopolitical and socioeconomic structure. (pp. 6–7, paraphrase)

For the new materialists, terms such as *agency, voice, subject, experience, presence, self, narrative, subjectivity, meaning, mind, consciousness, data, analysis, interpretation, and science* are to be used carefully, if at all. They privilege discourse, mind, and culture over matter, body, and nature. They are the remnants of an outdated humanism; their continued use reproduces a postpositivist interpretive discourse (see MacLure, 2015). The materialist critique opens up new spaces, new terms, post-human bodies, new ontologies of being and inquiry, a move away from epistemology, new views of voice, presence and performance, the mangle of post-human bodies, new body-machine-material entanglements (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 123). The materialists

challenge traditional qualitative researchers who rely on neopositivist and postpositivist traditional ethnographic approaches to rethink their assumptions.

The ontological and epistemological assumptions of the new materialists and the traditional, classical ethnographers are vastly different, making the approaches incompatible (Clarke et al., 2015, p. 40). Kuntz (2015) reminds us that “the new materialism presents productive ontological, epistemological, methodological and ethical possibilities that cannot be ignored, most importantly are its implications for truth-telling with the aim of *intervening within normative practices if knowing and being*” (p. 82, paraphrase). The materialist turn opens up spaces for the “notion of post-method, the spaces of the post-qualitative, methodologies without boundaries, methodologies that may go anywhere, methodologies that create a sense of uncertainty, mourning and loss, methodologies doing social justice work, truth telling for social change (pp. 12–13, 82, paraphrase).

A new paradigm is on the horizon, one that doubles back on itself and wanders in spaces that have not yet been named. It celebrates the implications for qualitative methodology of the recent (re)turn to materiality across the social sciences and humanities (MacLure, 2015, pp. 94–95). The “new materialisms” promise to go beyond the old antagonisms of nature and culture, science and the social, discourse and matter. While the turmoil now going on in the third (or fourth) moment seems to repeat 30-year-old arguments, some progress has been made. Moral and epistemological discourses now go on, side by side. This was not the case 30 years ago. Race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, the research rights of indigenous peoples, Whiteness, and queer studies are taken-for-granted topics today.

Resistances to Qualitative Studies

The academic and disciplinary resistances to qualitative research illustrate the politics embedded in this field of discourse. The challenges to qualitative research are many. To better understand these criticisms, it is necessary to “distinguish analytically the political (or external) role of [qualitative] methodology from the procedural (or internal) one” (Seale, Gobo, Gubrium, & Silverman, 2004, p. 7). Politics situate methodology within and outside the academy. Procedural issues define how qualitative methodology is used to produce knowledge about the world (Seale et al., 2004, p. 7). Often, the political and the procedural intersect. Politicians and hard scientists call qualitative researchers *journalists* or “soft” scientists. Their work is termed unscientific, only exploratory, or subjective. It is called criticism and not theory, or it is interpreted politically, as a disguised version of Marxism or secular humanism.

These political and procedural resistances reflect an uneasy awareness that the interpretive traditions of qualitative research commit one to a critique of the positivist or postpositivist project. But the positivist resistance to qualitative research goes beyond the “ever-present desire to maintain a distinction between hard science and soft scholarship” (Carey, 1989, p. 99). The experimental (positivist) sciences (e.g., physics, chemistry, economics, and psychology) are often seen as the crowning achievements of Western civilization, and in their practices, it is assumed that “truth” can transcend opinion and personal bias (Carey, 1989, p. 99; Schwandt, 1997, p. 309). Qualitative research is seen as an assault on this tradition, whose adherents often retreat into a “value-free objectivist science” (Carey, 1989, p. 104) model to defend their position. The positivists seldom attempt to make explicit and critique the “moral and political commitments in their own contingent work” (Carey, 1989, p. 104; Guba et al., Chapter 5, this volume).

Positivists and postpositivists further allege that the so-called new experimental qualitative researchers write fiction, not science, and have no way of verifying their truth statements. Ethnographic poetry and fiction signal the death of empirical science, and there is little to be gained by attempting to engage in moral criticism. These critics presume a stable, unchanging

reality that can be studied with the empirical methods of objective social science (see Huber, 1995). The province of qualitative research, accordingly, is the world of lived experience, for this is where individual belief and action intersect with culture. Under this model, there is no preoccupation with discourse and method as material interpretive practices that constitute representation and description. This is the textual, narrative turn rejected by the positivists. The opposition to positive science by the poststructuralists is seen, then, as an attack on reason and truth. At the same time, the positivist science attack on qualitative research is regarded as an attempt to legislate one version of truth over another.

The Legacies of Scientific Research

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

Frederick Erickson’s Chapter 2 of this volume charts many key features of this painful history. He notes with some irony that qualitative research in sociology and anthropology was born out of concern to understand the exotic, often dark-skinned “other.” Of course, there were colonialists long before there were anthropologists and ethnographers. Nonetheless, there would be no colonial—and now no neocolonial—history were it not for this investigative mentality that turned the dark-skinned other into the object of the ethnographer’s gaze. From the very beginning, qualitative research was implicated in a racist project.

Historical Moments

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

In North America, qualitative inquiry operates in a complex historical field that crosscuts eight to nine historical moments. We define them as the traditional (1900–1950), the modernist or golden age (1950–1970), blurred genres (1970–1980), the paradigm wars (1980–1985), the crisis of representation (1986–1990), the postmodern (1990–1995), postexperimental inquiry (1995–2000), the methodologically contested present (2000–2004), paradigm proliferation (2005–2010), and the fractured, posthumanist present that battles managerialism in the audit-driven academy (2010–2015), an uncertain, utopian future, where critical inquiry finds its voice in the public arena (2016–). These moments overlap in the present (see Clarke et al., 2015, pp. 21–43, for an expanded treatment of this history).

This historical model has been termed a progress narrative by Alasuutari (2004, pp. 599–600) and Seale et al. (2004, p. 2). The critics assert that we believe that the most recent moment is

the most up-to-date, the avant-garde, the cutting edge (Alasuutari, 2004, p. 601). Naturally, we dispute this reading. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) have modified our historical periods to fit their historical analysis of the major moments in the emergence of mixed methods in the past century.

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

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

Definitional Issues: Research Versus Inquiry

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

Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, artifacts, and cultural texts and productions, along with observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices, hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand. It is understood, however, that each practice makes the world visible in a different way. Hence, there is frequently a commitment to using more than one interpretive practice in any study.

Following the ontological turn in materialist discourse, Dimitriadis (2016) makes an important distinction between inquiry and research. Throughout the paradigm wars, qualitative researchers fought for a place at the table, resisting positivist domination from the SBR machine. They worked from a long and distinguished humanist, interpretive tradition, a tradition that extended from Max Weber and George Herbert Mead to Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner. It becomes fully robust in the recent present moment, with tangled up versions of race

theory, feminist theories, class theories, critical theory, and empowerment discourses, all the way to autoethnography. We got messy texts, texts with multiple voices, and interrogations of terms like truth, validity, voice, and data. Suddenly qualitative research is carrying the weight of the interpretive tradition on its shoulders.

Dimitriadis (2016) wonders if it would be better to retire the word *research* altogether and entertain for the moment the use of the word *inquiry*. *Inquiry* does not carry the trappings of the word *research*, which is tainted by a lingering positivism. *Inquiry* implies an open-endedness, uncertainty, ambiguity, praxis, pedagogies of liberation, freedom, resistance.

We could go one step further and make the performance turn, the human-being-as-performer, not as researcher or inquirer. A performative project, informed by research and inquiry, involves acting in the world so as to make it visible for social transformations. This is a postqualitative, postresearch-inquiry-world. It is a world defined by risk taking by textual experimentation, by ontologies of transformation, a world defined by acts of love, struggles, and resistance, a world shaped by dramatic radical acts of activism (Madison, 2010). Saldaña (2005) describes ethnodrama as

a word joining ethnography and drama. It is a written play script consisting of dramatized, significant selections of narrative collected from interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journal entries, personal memories/experiences, print and media artifacts, and . . . historical documents. Simply put, this is dramatizing the data (Saldaña, 2011, p. 13; 2005, pp. 1–2). *Ethnotheatre* joins ethnography and theatre, using the traditional craft and artistic techniques of theatre production to mount for an audience a live or mediated performance event of research participants' experiences and/or the researcher's interpretations of them. (p. 1)

Madison (2012) reminds us,

If we accept the notion of human beings as *homo performans* and therefore as a performing species, performance becomes necessary for our survival. That is we recognize and create ourselves as Others through performance . . . in this process culture and performance become inextricably interconnected and performance is a constant presence in our daily lives. (p. 166, paraphrase)

This is why one community of postqualitative researchers/inquirers has turned to a performance-based vocabulary.

The Qualitative Researcher-as-Bricoleur

Multiple gendered images may be brought to the qualitative researcher: scientist, naturalist, fieldworker, journalist, social critic, artist, performer, jazz musician, filmmaker, quilt maker, essayist. The many methodological practices of qualitative research may be viewed as soft science, journalism, ethnography, ethnotheatre, ethnodrama, bricolage, quilt making, or montage. The researcher, in turn, may be seen as a *bricoleur*. There are many kinds of bricoleurs—interpretive, narrative, theoretical, political. The interpretive bricoleur produces a bricolage, that is, a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation. “The solution (bricolage) which is the result of the bricoleur's method is an [emergent] construction” (Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991, p. 161), which changes and takes new forms as different tools, methods, and techniques of representation and interpretation are added to the puzzle. Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg (1992) describe the methodology of cultural studies “as a bricolage. Its choice of practice, that is, is pragmatic, strategic, and self-reflexive” (p. 2).

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

The interpretive bricoleur understands that research is an interactive process shaped by one's personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting. Critical bricoleurs stress the dialectical and hermeneutic nature of interdisciplinary inquiry, knowing that the boundaries between traditional disciplines no longer hold (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 683). The political bricoleur knows that science is power, for all research findings have political implications. There is no value-free science. A civic social science based on a politics of hope is sought (Lincoln, 1999). The gendered, narrative bricoleur also knows that researchers all tell stories about the worlds they have studied. Thus, the narratives or stories scientists tell are accounts couched and framed within specific storytelling traditions, often defined as paradigms (e.g., positivism, postpositivism, constructivism). The product of the interpretive bricoleur's labor is a complex, quilt-like bricolage, a reflexive collage or montage; a set of fluid, interconnected images and representations. This interpretive structure is like a quilt, a performance text, or a sequence of representations connecting the parts to the whole.

Qualitative Research as a Site of Multiple Interpretive Practices

Qualitative research, as a set of interpretive activities, privileges no single methodological practice over another. As a site of discussion or discourse, qualitative research is difficult to define clearly. It has no theory or paradigm that is distinctly its own. As Part II of this volume reveals, multiple theoretical paradigms claim use of qualitative research methods and strategies, from constructivism to cultural studies, feminism, Marxism, and ethnic models of study. Qualitative research is used in many separate disciplines, as we will discuss below. It does not belong to a single discipline.

Nor does qualitative research have a distinct set of methods or practices that are entirely its own. Qualitative researchers use semiotics, narrative, content, discourse, archival, and phonemic analysis—even statistics, tables, graphs, and numbers. They also draw on and use the approaches, methods, and techniques of ethnomethodology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, feminism, rhizomatics, deconstructionism, ethnographies, interviews, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, survey research, and participant observation, among others. No specific method or practice can be privileged over another. Each method bears the traces of its own disciplinary history.

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

postpositivist and poststructural historians bring different understandings and uses to the methods and findings of historical research. These tensions and contradictions are evident in many of the chapters in this handbook.

These separate and multiple uses and meanings of the methods of qualitative research make it difficult to agree on any essential definition of the field, for it is never just one thing. Still, a definition must be offered. We borrow from and paraphrase Nelson et al.'s (1992) attempt to define cultural studies:

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

Qualitative research/inquiry embraces two tensions at the same time. On the one hand, it is drawn to a broad, interpretive, postexperimental, postmodern, feminist, and critical sensibility. On the other hand, it is drawn to more narrowly defined positivist, postpositivist, humanistic, and naturalistic conceptions of human experience and its analysis. Furthermore, these tensions can be combined in the same project, bringing both postmodern and naturalistic, or both critical and humanistic, perspectives to bear, often in conflict with one another. (p. 4)

This rather awkward statement means that qualitative research is a set of complex interpretive practices. As a constantly shifting historical formation, it embraces tensions and contradictions, including disputes over its methods and the forms its findings and interpretations take. The field sprawls between and crosscuts all of the human disciplines, even including, in some cases, the physical sciences. Its practitioners are variously committed to modern, postmodern, and postexperimental sensibilities and the approaches to social research that these sensibilities imply.

Politics and Reemergent Scientism

In the first decade of this new century, the scientifically based research movement (SBR) initiated by the National Research Council (NRC) created a new and hostile political environment for qualitative research (Howe, 2009). Connected to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), SBR embodied a reemergent scientism (Maxwell, 2004), a positivist evidence-based epistemology. Researchers were encouraged to employ “rigorous, systematic, and objective methodology to obtain reliable and valid knowledge” (Ryan & Hood, 2004, p. 80). The preferred methodology has well-defined causal models using independent and dependent variables. Causal models are examined in the context of randomized controlled experiments, which allow replication and generalization (Ryan & Hood, 2004, p. 81).

Under this framework, qualitative research becomes suspect. There are no well-defined variables or causal models. Observations and measurements are not based on random assignment to experimental groups. Hard evidence is not generated by these methods. At best, case study, interview, and ethnographic methods offer descriptive materials that can be tested with experimental methods. The epistemologies of critical race, queer, postcolonial, feminist, and postmodern theories are rendered useless, relegated at best to the category of scholarship, not science (Ryan & Hood, 2004, p. 81; St. Pierre & Roulston, 2006).

Critics of the SBR movement argued that the movement endorsed a narrow view of science, celebrated a “neoclassical experimentalism that is a throwback to the Campbell-Stanley era and its dogmatic adherence to an exclusive reliance on quantitative methods” (Howe, 2004, p. 42).

Neoclassical experimentalists extolled evidence-based “medical research as the model for educational research, particularly the random clinical trial” (Howe, 2004, p. 48). But the random clinical trial—dispensing a pill—is quite unlike “dispensing a curriculum” (Howe, 2004, p. 48), nor can the “effects” of the educational experiment be easily measured, unlike a “10-point reduction in diastolic blood pressure” (Howe, 2004, p. 48).

The SBR movement created a second-class place for qualitative methods in mixed-methods experimental designs (Howe, 2004, p. 49). V. L. P. Clark, Creswell, Green, and Shope (2008) define mixed-methods research “as a design for collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a study in order to understand a research problem” (p. 364). The call for mixed methods presumes a methodological hierarchy, with quantitative methods at the top, relegating qualitative methods to “a largely auxiliary role in pursuit of the *technocratic* aim of accumulating knowledge of ‘what works’” (Howe, 2004, pp. 53–54). The traditional mixed-methods movement takes qualitative methods out of their natural home, which is within the critical interpretive framework (Howe, 2004, p. 54). It divides inquiry into dichotomous categories, exploration versus confirmation. Qualitative work is assigned to the first category, quantitative research to the second (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003, p. 15). Like the classic experimental model, this movement excludes stakeholders from dialogue and active participation in the research process. Doing so weakens its democratic and dialogical dimensions and decreases the likelihood that previously silenced voices will be heard (Howe, 2004, pp. 56–57).

The Pragmatic Criticisms of Anti-Foundationalism

Clive Seale et al. (2004) contest what they regard as the excesses of an anti-methodological, “anything goes,” romantic postmodernism that is associated the poststructural, interpretive project. They assert that too often, the approach produces “low quality qualitative research and research results that are quite stereotypical and close to common sense” (p. 2). In contrast, they propose a practice-based, pragmatic approach that places research practice at the center. Research involves an engagement “with a variety of things and people: research materials . . . social theories, philosophical debates, values, methods, tests . . . research participants” (p. 2). (Actually, this approach is quite close to our own, especially our view of the bricoleur and bricolage.)

Their situated methodology rejects the anti-foundational claim that there are only partial truths, that the dividing line between fact and fiction has broken down (Seale et al., 2004, p. 3; for parallel criticism, see Adler & Adler, 2008; Atkinson & Delamont, 2006; Hammersly, 2008). They believe that this dividing line has not collapsed and that we should not accept stories if they do not accord with the best available facts. Oddly, these pragmatic procedural arguments reproduce a variant of the evidence-based model and its criticisms of poststructural performative sensibilities. They can be used to provide political support for the methodological marginalization of many of the positions advanced in this handbook.

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

In the meantime, battles between the SBR (quantitative) and anti-SBR (qualitative) camps continue. Uwe Flick (2002) summarizes,

The quantitative approach has been used for purposes of isolating “causes and effects . . . operationalizing theoretical relations . . . [and] measuring and . . . quantifying phenomena . . . allowing the generalization of findings” (p. 3). But today, doubt is cast on such projects. Rapid social change and the resulting diversification of life worlds are increasingly confronting social researchers with new social contexts and perspectives . . . traditional deductive methodologies . . . are failing . . . thus research is increasingly forced to make use of inductive strategies instead of starting from theories and testing them . . . knowledge and practice are studied as local knowledge and practice. (p. 2; see also the discussion of numeracy and the ontology of numbers above)

Tensions Within Qualitative Research

Positivist, postpositivist, poststructural, and postqualitative differences define and shape the discourses of qualitative research. Realists and postpositivists within the interpretive, qualitative research tradition criticize poststructuralists for taking the textual, narrative turn. These critics contend that such work is navel-gazing. It produces the conditions “for a dialogue of the deaf between itself and the community” (Silverman, 1997, p. 240). Those who attempt to capture the point of view of the interacting subject in the world are accused of naive humanism, of reproducing a Romantic impulse that elevates the experiential to the level of the authentic (Silverman, 1997, p. 248). Martyn Hammersley (2008, p. 1) goes so far as to argue that qualitative research is facing a crisis symbolized by an ill-conceived postmodernist image of qualitative research, which is dismissive of traditional forms of inquiry. He feels that “unless this dynamic can be interrupted the future of qualitative research is endangered” (p. 11). Still others argue that lived experience is ignored by those who take the textual, performance turn. David Snow and Calvin Morrill (1995) argue that “this performance turn, like the preoccupation with discourse and storytelling, will take us further from the field of social action and the real dramas of everyday life and thus signal the death knell of ethnography as an empirically grounded enterprise” (p. 361). Of course, we disagree.

Paul Atkinson and Sara Delamont (2006), two qualitative scholars in the traditional, classic Chicago school tradition, offer a corrective. They remain committed to qualitative (and quantitative) research, “*provided that they are conducted rigorously and contribute to robustly useful knowledge*” (p. 749). Of course, these scholars are committed to social policy initiatives at some level. But, for them, the postmodern image of qualitative inquiry threatens and undermines the value of traditional qualitative inquiry. Atkinson and Delamont exhort qualitative researchers to “think hard about whether their investigations are the best social science they could be” (p. 749). Patricia Adler and Peter Adler (2008) implore the radical postmodernists to “give up the project for the good of the discipline and for the good of society” (p. 23).

Hammersley (2008, pp. 134–136, 144), extends the traditional critique, finding little value in the work of ethnographic postmodernists and literary ethnographers. This new tradition, he asserts, legitimates speculative theorizing, celebrates obscurity, and abandons the primary task of inquiry, which is to produce truthful knowledge about the world (p. 144). Poststructural inquirers get it from all sides. The criticisms, Carolyn Ellis (2009, p. 231) observes, fall into three overlapping categories. Our work (1) is too aesthetic and not sufficiently realistic and does not provide hard data, (2) is too realistic and not mindful of poststructural criticisms concerning the “real” self and its place in the text, and (3) is not sufficiently aesthetic, or literary; that is, we are second-rate writers and poets (p. 232).

The Politics of Evidence

The critics' model of science is anchored in the belief that there is an empirical world that is obdurate and talks back to investigators. This is an empirical science based on evidence that corroborates interpretations. This is a science that returns to and is lodged in the real, a science that stands outside nearly all of the turns listed above; this is Chicago school neo-postpositivism.

Contrast this certain science to the position of those who are preoccupied with the politics of evidence. Jan Morse (2006; also Morse, Chapter 35, this volume), for example, reminds us that evidence is not just something that is out there. Evidence has to be produced, constructed, represented. Furthermore, the politics of evidence cannot be separated from the ethics of evidence. Under the Jan Morse model, representations of empirical reality become problematic. Objective representation of reality is impossible. Each representation calls into place a different set of ethical questions regarding evidence, including how it is obtained and what it means. But surely a middle ground can be found. If there is a return to the spirit of the paradigm dialogues of the 1980s, then multiple representations of a situation should be encouraged, perhaps placed alongside one another.

Indeed, the interpretive camp is not antisience per se. We do something different. We believe in multiple forms of science: soft, hard, strong, feminist, interpretive, critical, realist, postrealist, and posthumanist. In a sense, the traditional and postmodern projects are incommensurate. We interpret, we perform, we interrupt, we challenge, and we believe nothing is ever certain. We want performance texts that quote history back to itself, texts that focus on epiphanies; on the intersection of biography, history, culture, and politics; on turning-point moments in people's lives. The critics are correct on this point. We have a political orientation that is radical, democratic, and interventionist. Many postpositivists share these politics.

Qualitative Research as Process

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

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

The Other as Research Subject

From its turn-of-the-century birth in modern, interpretive form, qualitative research has been haunted by a double-faced ghost. On one hand, qualitative researchers have assumed that qualified, competent observers could, with objectivity, clarity, and precision, report on their own observations of the social world, including the experiences of others. Second, researchers have held to the belief in a real subject or real individual who is present in the world and able, in some form, to report on his or her experiences. So armed, researchers could blend their own observations with the self-reports provided by subjects through interviews, life story, personal experience, and case study documents.

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

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

Table 1.1 depicts the relationships we see among the five phases that define the research process (the researcher, major paradigms, research strategies, methods of collecting and analyzing empirical materials, and the art, practices, and politics of interpretation). Behind all but one of these phases stands the biographically situated researcher. These five levels of activity, or practice, work their way through the biography of the researcher. We take them up in brief order here, for each phase is more fully discussed in the transition sections between the various parts of this volume.

Phase 1: The Researcher

Our remarks above indicate the depth and complexity of the traditional and applied qualitative research perspectives into which a socially situated researcher enters. These traditions locate the researcher in history, simultaneously guiding and constraining work that will be done in any specific study. This field has been constantly characterized by diversity and conflict, and these are its most enduring traditions. As a carrier of this complex and contradictory history, the researcher must also confront the ethics and politics of research (Christians, Chapter 3, this volume). It is no longer possible for the human disciplines to research the native, the indigenous other, in a spirit of value-free inquiry. Today, researchers struggle to develop situational and transsituational ethics that apply to all forms of the research act and its human-to-human relationships. We no longer have the option of deferring the decolonization project.

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

History and research traditions

Conceptions of self and the other

The ethics and politics of research

Phase 2: Theoretical Paradigms and Perspectives

Positivism, postpositivism

Interpretivism, constructivism, hermeneutics

Feminism(s)

Racialized discourses

Critical theory, participatory and Marxist models

Cultural studies models

Queer theory

Postcolonialism

Postmaterialist

Phase 3: Research Strategies

Design

Case study

Performance ethnography

Ethnodrama/ethnotheatre

Constructionist analytics

Grounded theory, social justice inquiry

Triangulation

Life history, *testimonio*

Data and their problematics

Critical participatory action research

Phase 4: Methods of Collection and Analysis

Narrative inquiry

Observing in a surveilled world

Arts-based inquiry

The interview

Visual methods

Autoethnography

Ethnography in the digital Internet era

Analyzing talk and text

Focus group research

Thinking with theory

Collaborative inquiry

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

Evidence, criteria, policy, politics

Rigor

Writing as a method of inquiry

The politics of evidence and emancipatory discourses

Qualitative evaluation

Qualitative research and global audit culture

Phase 2: Interpretive Paradigms

All qualitative researchers are philosophers in that “universal sense in which all human beings . . . are guided by highly abstract principles” (Bateson, 1972, p. 320). These principles combine beliefs about *ontology* (What kind of being is the human being? What is the nature of reality?), *epistemology* (What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known?), and *methodology* (How do we know the world or gain knowledge of it?) (see Guba, 1990, p. 18; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 14–15; Guba et al., Chapter 5, this volume). These beliefs shape how the qualitative researcher sees the world and acts in it. The researcher is “bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises which—regardless of ultimate truth or falsity—become partially self-validating” (Bateson, 1972, p. 314).

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

At the most general level, five major interpretive paradigms structure qualitative research: positivist and postpositivist, critical, feminist, constructivist-interpretivist, and participatory-postmodern-poststructural. These five abstract paradigms (or figured worlds) become more complicated at the level of concrete specific interpretive communities. At this level, it is possible to identify not only the constructivist but also multiple versions of feminism (Afrocentric and poststructural), as well as specific ethnic, feminist, endarkened, social justice, Marxist, cultural studies, disability, and non-Western-Asian paradigms. These perspectives or paradigms are examined in Part II of this volume.

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

Table 1.2 presents these paradigms and their assumptions, including their criteria for evaluating research, and the typical form that an interpretive or theoretical statement assumes in the paradigm.

Each paradigm is explored in considerable detail in Chapters 5 through 12. The positivist and postpositivist paradigms were discussed above. They work from within a realist and critical realist ontology and objective epistemologies, and they rely on experimental, quasi-experimental, survey, and rigorously defined qualitative methodologies.

TABLE 1.2 Interpretive Paradigms

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

The *constructivist paradigm* assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures. Terms like *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability* replace the usual positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity.

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

Poststructural feminist theories emphasize problems with the social text, its logic, and its inability to ever represent the world of lived experience fully (Olesen, Chapter 6, this volume; DeVault, Chapter 7, this volume). Positivist and postpositivist criteria of evaluation are replaced by other terms, including the reflexive, multivoiced text, which is grounded in the experiences of oppressed people. The cultural studies and queer theory paradigms are multifocused, with many different strands drawing from Marxism, feminism, and the postmodern sensibility (Saukko, Chapter 11, this volume; Alexander, Chapter 12, this volume). There is a tension between a humanistic cultural studies, which stresses lived experiences (meaning), and a more structural cultural studies project, which stresses the structural and material determinants and effects (race, class, gender) of experience. Of course, there are two sides to every coin; both sides are needed and are indeed critical. The cultural studies and queer theory paradigms use methods strategically, that is, as resources for understanding and producing resistances to local

structures of domination. Such scholars may do close textual readings and discourse analysis of cultural texts (Chase, Chapter 24, this volume; Finley, Chapter 25, this volume), as well as local, online, reflexive, and critical ethnographies (Markham, Chapter 29, this volume); open-ended interviewing; and participant observation. The focus is on how race, class, and gender are produced and enacted in historically specific situations.

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

Phase 3: Strategies of Inquiry and Interpretive Paradigms

Table 1.1 presents some of the major strategies of inquiry a researcher may use. Phase 3 begins with research design, which broadly conceived involves a clear focus on the research question, the purposes of the study, “what information most appropriately will answer specific research questions, and which strategies are most effective for obtaining it.” A research design describes a flexible set of guidelines that connect theoretical paradigms, first, to strategies of inquiry and, second, to methods for collecting empirical material. A research design situates researchers in the empirical world and connects them to specific sites, people, groups, institutions, and bodies of relevant interpretive material, including documents and archives. A research design also specifies how the investigator will address the two critical issues of representation and legitimation.

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

Phase 4: Methods of Collecting and Analyzing Empirical Materials

The researcher has several methods for representing empirical materials. These topics are taken up in Part IV. They include observation, narrative inquiry, arts-based inquiry, the interview, visual research, autoethnography, online ethnography, analyzing talk and text, focus groups, thinking with theory, and collaborative inquiry. The chapters in this volume by Bratich (Chapter 23), Chase (Chapter 24), Finley (Chapter 25), Brinkmann (Chapter 26), Margolis and Zunjarwad (Chapter 27), Spry (Chapter 28), Markham (Chapter 29), Perkälä and Ruusuvoori (Chapter 30), Kamberelis et al. (Chapter 31), Jackson and Mazzei (Chapter 32), and Wyatt, Gale, Gannon, and Davies (Chapter 33) analyze these topics.

Phase 5: The Art and Politics of Interpretation, Evaluation, and Presentation

As Torrance (Chapter 34) and Morse (Chapter 35) (after Denzin, Cheek, and Spooner) demonstrate, considerable controversy surrounds the issues of evidence, criteria, quality, and utility in educational and social research. Torrance asks important questions: Who has the right to decide these matters? With Morse and Spooner, he asks who has the right to decide that counts as evidence. How are funding decisions made in the global audit culture? What is

the political economy of critical social inquiry? Peter Dahler-Larsen (Chapter 39, this volume) shows how qualitative evaluation puts critical inquiry methods to practical use through the use of a variety of evaluation models.

Qualitative research/inquiry is endlessly creative and interpretive. The researcher does not just leave the field with mountains of empirical materials and easily write up his or her findings. The writer creates narratives, braided compositions woven into and through field experiences. Qualitative interpretations are constructed. The researcher often creates a field text consisting of field notes and documents from the field, what Roger Sanjek (1992, p. 386) calls “indexing” and David Plath (1990, p. 374) “filework.” The writer-as-interpretive moves from this text to an ethno-text, a research text—notes, stories, and interpretations based on the field text. This text is then re-created as a working interpretive document. Finally, the writer produces the public text that comes to the reader. This final tale from the field may assume several forms: confessional, realist, impressionistic, critical, formal, literary, analytic, grounded theory, and so on (see Van Maanen, 1988). In the world of performance autoethnography, this is called moving from body to paper to stage (Spry, Chapter 28, this volume).

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

Program evaluation is a major site of qualitative research, and qualitative evaluators can influence social policy in important ways. Applied, qualitative research in the social sciences has a rich history. This is the critical site where theory, method, praxis, action, and policy all come together. Qualitative researchers can isolate target populations, show the immediate effects of certain programs on such groups, and isolate the constraints that operate against policy changes in such settings. Action-oriented qualitative researchers can also create spaces for those who are studied (the other) to speak. The evaluator becomes the conduit for making such voices heard.

Part 6: Into the Future: Bridging the Historical Moments: What Comes Next?

St. Pierre (2004) argues that we are already in the post “post” period—post-poststructuralism, post-postmodernism, postexperimental, postqualitative. What this means for interpretive, ethnographic practices is still not clear. But it is certain that things will never again be the same. We are in a new age where messy, uncertain multivoiced texts, cultural criticism, and new experimental works will become more common, as will more reflexive forms of fieldwork, analysis, and intertextual representation. In a complex space like this, pedagogy becomes critical—that is, how do we teach qualitative methods in an age of ontological, epistemological, and methodological uncertainty? Where do we go after we have taken the ontological turn? What does this turn mean for public scholarship, for public engagement? It is true, as the poet said, the center no longer holds. We can reflect on what should be in this new center.

Marc Spooner (Chapter 40, this volume) suggests that we academics are trapped by the audit culture: “In this moment, we, as academics, are depersonalized, quantified, and constrained in our scholarship via a suffocating array of metrics and technologies of governance” (p. XXX). David Westbrook (Chapter 41, this volume) takes the long view and suggests that “the material conditions under which qualitative research has been conducted since the 19th century may

no longer obtain. There may be no reason for a society to devote time, energy, and resources to the institutionalization of qualitative research” (p. XXX).

On this depressing note we come full circle. And returning to our bridge metaphor, the chapters that follow take the researcher back and forth through every phase of the research act. Like a good bridge, the chapters provide for two-way traffic, coming and going between moments, formations, and interpretive communities. Each chapter examines the relevant histories, controversies, and current practices that are associated with each paradigm, strategy, and method. Each chapter also offers projections for the future, where a specific paradigm, strategy, or method will be 10 years from now, deep into the third decade of this now not so new century.

In reading this volume, it is important to remember that the field of qualitative research is defined by a series of tensions, contradictions, and hesitations. This tension works back and forth between and among (1) the broad, doubting, postmodern sensibility; (2) the more certain, more traditional positivist, postpositivist, and naturalistic conceptions of this project; and (3) an increasingly conservative, neoliberal global environment. All of the chapters that follow are caught in and articulate these tensions.

Notes

1. See also in this volume chapters by Koro-Ljungberg, Maclure, and Ulmer (Chapter 20); Jackson and Mazzei (Chapter 32); and Wyatt, Gale, Gannon, and Davis (Chapter 33).
2. What William Faulkner said of the past in the South, “The *past* is not dead! Actually, it’s not even *past*,” can also be said of the wars and methodological history we write; it is not dead yet, and it is not even past. This is why we are going to such lengths to discuss these historical moments and their complexities.
3. This section steals from Clarke, Friese, and Washburn (2015, pp. 37–43).
4. Lubomir Popov maintains a website for the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry listing an annual 12-month calendar of international qualitative research conferences ([icqi.org](http://www.icqi.org); conferences under <http://www.iiqi.org/>).
5. Association for Contemporary Ethnography Across the Disciplines (ACEAD) is a New Zealand–based international association.
6. A paradigm is a basic set of beliefs that guide action (Guba, 1990, p. 17). A paradigm encompasses four terms: *ethics*, *epistemology*, *ontology*, and *methodology*.
7. The Mixed Methods International Research Association was formed in 2014. Its official journal is the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*. The association has a quarterly newsletter.
8. Two theses structured the paradigm argument between qualitative and quantitative methods. The incompatibility thesis argued that the methods could not be combined because of fundamental differences in their paradigm assumptions (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003, pp. 14–15). The incommensurability thesis said the two paradigms were in fundamental contradiction with one another.
9. They contend that our second moment, the golden age (1950–1970), was marked by the debunking of positivism, the emergence of postpositivism, and the development of designs that used mixed quantitative and qualitative methods. Full-scale conflict developed throughout the 1970–1990 period, the time of the first “paradigm war.” Jameson (1991, pp. 3–4) reminds us that any periodization hypothesis is always suspect, even ones that reject linear, stage-like models. It is never clear what reality a stage refers to. What divides one stage from another is always debatable. Our moments are meant to mark discernible shifts in style, genre, epistemology, ethics politics, and aesthetics.
10. Conflict broke out between the many different empowerment pedagogies: feminist, antiracist, radical, Freirean, liberation theology, postmodernists, poststructuralists, cultural studies, and so on (see Erickson, Chapter 2, this volume; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research has separate and distinguished histories in education, social work, communications, psychology, history, organizational studies, medical science, anthropology, and sociology, and these disciplines have had their own paradigm battles.

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