

Wolcott, H. F. (1987). On ethnographic intent. In G. Spindler & L. Spindler (Eds.), *Interpretive ethnography of education: At home and abroad* (pp. 37-57). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Wolcott, H. F. (1994b). *Transforming qualitative data: Description, analysis, and interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Finally, for case study research, consult Stake (1995) or earlier books such as Lincoln and Guba (1985), Merriam (1988), and Yin (1989). Stake (1994) provides a good overview of qualitative case study research.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Merriam, S. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Stake, R. (1994). Case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 236-247). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Yin, R. K. (1989). *Case study research: Design and method*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

EXERCISES

1. Continue to develop your study begun in the Exercises in Chapter 2 and refined in the Exercises in Chapter 3. Build on your section where you specify a tradition of inquiry. Provide a definition for your choice, key references about it, and the major characteristics and procedures of the tradition.
2. In this chapter, I have provided only a brief summary of each tradition. For your tradition of choice, select one of the books mentioned in the Additional Readings section and summarize the major concepts of the tradition including the procedures to be used to conduct a study.

5



Philosophical and Theoretical Frameworks

In this chapter, I begin examining the relationship between the five traditions of inquiry and phases of research design. An initial phase of design, then, is to consider not only whether a qualitative study is suitable for the study of a problem (as discussed in Chapter 2) but also to frame the study within the philosophical and theoretical perspectives. The philosophical or theoretical lenses range from broad perspectives, such as epistemological and ontological assumptions, to ideological stances, such as postmodernism and critical perspectives, to more narrowly defined "theories" (Flinders & Mills, 1993) composed of propositions and hypotheses found in the social and human sciences.

In this chapter, I begin with five assumptions that guide the design and are central to all good qualitative studies: the multiple nature of reality, the close relationship of the researcher to that being researched, the value-laden aspect of inquiry, the personal approach to writing the narrative, and the emerging inductive methodology of the process of research. For each assumption, I identify its central characteristics, discuss its application in research, and illustrate it with examples from the five traditions of inquiry.

These assumptions operate at a broad abstract level in guiding the design of all qualitative studies. In addition, the researcher may employ an ideological perspective popular today. In this chapter, I address three of these perspectives—the postmodern, critical, and feminist approaches—and illustrate their use in the five traditions. Regardless of tradition, these perspectives represent a conscious choice by the researcher (Schwandt, 1993).

At a less abstract level, researchers may employ a social science theory to guide their qualitative studies. Central to this issue is whether they should use a theoretical framework to guide their studies and, if so, to what extent, recognizing that all researchers begin with some hunches, ideas, and frameworks from past experiences and readings. In this chapter, I discuss the extent to which investigators use a social science theory *before* they pose questions and collect data and after data collection in each of the five traditions of inquiry.

Questions for Discussion

- ▼ What philosophical assumptions guide all qualitative studies?
- ▼ What are examples of ideological perspectives that qualitative researchers employ?
- ▼ How is social science theory used by authors in each of the five traditions of inquiry?

FIVE PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS

Qualitative researchers approach their studies with a certain **paradigm or worldview**, a basic set of beliefs or assumptions that guide their inquiries. These assumptions are related to the nature of reality (the ontology issue), the relationship of the researcher to that being researched (the epistemological issue), the role of values in a study (the axiological issue), and the process of research (the methodological issue) (see Table 5.1). The assumptions in Table 5.1 are adapted from the “axiomatic” issues advanced by Guba and Lincoln (1988). However, my discussion departs from their analysis in three ways. I do not contrast the qualitative or naturalistic assumptions with conventional

TABLE 5.1 Philosophical Assumptions With Implications for Practice

Assumption	Question	Characteristics	Implications for Practice (examples)
Ontological	What is the nature of reality?	Reality is subjective and multiple, as seen by participants in the study	Researcher uses quotes and themes in words of participants and provides evidence of different perspectives
Epistemological	What is the relationship between the researcher and that being researched?	Researcher attempts to lessen distance between himself or herself and that being researched	Researcher collaborates, spends time in field with participants, and becomes an “insider”
Axiological	What is the role of values?	Researcher acknowledges that research is value laden and that biases are present	Researcher openly discusses values that shape the narrative and includes own interpretation in conjunction with interpretation of participants
Rhetorical	What is the language of research?	Researcher writes in a literary, informal style using the personal voice and uses qualitative terms and limited definitions	Researcher uses an engaging style of narrative, may use first-person pronoun, and employs the language of qualitative research
Methodological	What is the process of research?	Researcher uses inductive logic, studies the topic within its context, and uses an emerging design	Researcher works with particulars (details) before generalizations, describes in detail the context of the study, and continually revises questions from experiences in the field

or positive assumptions as they do, acknowledging that qualitative research is legitimate in its own right and does not need to be com-

pared to achieve respectability, I add to their issues one of my own concerns, the rhetorical assumption, recognizing that one needs to attend to the language and terms of qualitative inquiry. Finally, I discuss the practical implications of each assumption and attempt to bridge philosophy with practice.

Briefly, the **ontological** issue addresses the nature of reality for the qualitative researcher; reality is constructed by individuals involved in the research situation. Thus, multiple realities exist, such as the realities of the researcher, those of individuals being investigated, and those of the reader or audience interpreting a study. The qualitative researcher needs to report these realities, rely on voices and interpretations of informants through extensive quotes, present themes that reflect words used by informants, and advance evidence of different perspectives on each theme. Thus, for example, in a phenomenological study, one reports multiple statements representing the diverse perspectives on the phenomenon being explored (Moustakas, 1994). In one of my grounded theory studies on balance between the personal and work lives of academic chairpersons, I attempt to find multiple perspectives within each theme and report divergent views (Creswell & Urbom, 1997).

On the **epistemological** assumption, the relationship of the researcher to that being researched, qualitative researchers interact with those they study, whether this interaction assumes the form of living with or observing informants over a prolonged period of time or actual collaboration. In short, the researcher tries to minimize the "distance" or "objective separateness" (Guba & Lincoln, 1988, p. 94) between himself or herself and those being researched. Thus, in ethnographic research, prolonged time in the field for the investigator minimizes the distance as the investigator's observational role shifts from that of an "outsider" to that of an "insider" during his or her stay in the field.

Undoubtedly, this role and the close distance between the researcher and the participants have implications for the **axiological** assumption, the role of values in a study. In a qualitative study, the investigator admits the value-laden nature of the study and actively reports his or her values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered from the field. In an interpretive biography, for example, the researcher's presence is apparent in the text, and the

author admits that the stories voiced represent an interpretation and presentation of the author as much as the subject of the study.

Literary forms of writing such as the use of metaphors, the use of first-person "I," and a focus on stories pervade qualitative inquiries. Basing research on the **rhetorical** assumption means that the qualitative investigator uses specific terms and a personal and literary narrative in the study. Hence, instead of terms such as *internal validity*, *external validity*, *generalizability*, and *objectivity*, the qualitative researcher writing a case study may employ terms such as *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as well as naturalistic generalizations (Stake, 1995). Words such as *understanding*, *discover*, and *meaning* form the glossary of emerging qualitative terms and are important rhetorical markers in writing purpose statements and research questions to be discussed later. Moreover, the language of qualitative studies becomes personal, literary, and based on definitions that evolve during a study rather than being defined by the researcher at the beginning of a study. Seldom does one see an extensive "Definition of Terms" section in a qualitative study because the terms as defined by informants are of primary importance.

From these distinctions about reality, the relationship between the researcher and that being researched, the role of values, and the rhetoric of the study emerges the **methodological** assumption, how one conceptualizes the entire research process. In a qualitative methodology, the researcher *starts* inductively, although in grounded theory, for example, the initial inductive logic of generating open coding and generating a theory evolves into the deductive process of examining the theory against existing and new databases. But overall, the qualitative researcher works inductively, such as when he or she develops categories from informants rather than specifying them in advance of the research. In a case study, for example, the researcher details the description of the case and its setting or context before mentioning the more abstract themes. The investigator may "layer the analysis," presenting numerous themes initially, followed by grouping these themes into broader and more abstract categories later. In phenomenology, the researcher first details the individual statements of informants about experiences with the phenomenon before moving to meanings and clusters of meanings. This inductive approach to de-

veloping the qualitative narrative shows that the process is one of an emerging design. For example, a researcher begins a qualitative study with general questions and refines them as the study proceeds. In addition, the process of qualitative research includes a discussion of the context of the subject or case being studied. Nowhere is the context more apparent than in a qualitative case study, where one describes the setting for the case from the more general description to the specific description. Thus, in our gunman study (Asmusen & Creswell, 1995), we first present the city, the campus, the building, and finally the classroom and the gunman incident.

IDEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

These philosophical assumptions mark all qualitative studies. In addition, the researcher may elect to use ideological perspectives to draw attention to the needs of people and social action. For example, a study may include a postmodern critique as a way of thinking about socially responsive research, a critical theory orientation toward action, or a feminist approach to research for women with gender issues of primary concern. The researcher may include one or more of these perspectives (or others related to cultural or marginalized groups) in different aspects of a study, such as in a conceptual perspective at the beginning of a study, in the approach to data collection, in self-disclosing comments throughout the qualitative narrative, or in issues chosen to study.

Why would a researcher use one of these perspectives? Ultimately, it turns, I believe, on the personal concerns of the researcher. These personal concerns may reflect a heartfelt need to promote social action, to lift the "voices" of marginalized or oppressed people, to explore gender issues that have served to dominate and repress women, or to bring about general change in our society. One of these perspectives may be ideal to use for studying certain groups such as marginalized minorities, oppressed gays and lesbians, or street people without a voice. Regardless of the reasons, these perspectives provide one more philosophical and conceptual framework that might guide a study.

Postmodernism

Thomas (1993) calls postmodernists "armchair radicals" (p. 23) who focus their critiques on changing ways of thinking rather than on calling for action based on these changes. Rather than viewing **postmodernism** as a theory, it might be considered a family of theories and perspectives that have something in common (Slife & Williams, 1995). Postmodernists advance a reaction to or critique of the 19th-century Enlightenment and early 20th-century emphasis on technology, rationality, reason, universals, science, and the positivist, scientific method (Bloland, 1995; Stringer, 1993). In response, postmodern thinking emerged in the humanities in the 1960s, gained momentum in the 1970s, and permeated the social sciences in the 1980s and 1990s. The basic concept is that knowledge claims must be set within the conditions of the world today and in the multiple perspectives of class, race, gender, and other group affiliations. These conditions are well articulated by individuals such as Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, Giroux, and Freire (Bloland, 1995). These are negative conditions, and they show themselves in the presence of hierarchies, power and control by individuals in these hierarchies, and the multiple meanings of language. Also included in the conditions are the importance of different discourses, the importance of marginalized people and groups (the "other"), the presence of "meta-narratives" or universals that hold true regardless of the social conditions, and the need to "deconstruct" texts in terms of both reading and writing, examining and bringing to the surface concealed hierarchies as well as dominations, oppositions, inconsistencies, and contradictions (Bloland, 1995; Stringer, 1993). Denzin's (1989a) approach to "interpretive" biography, for example, draws on postmodernism in that his method is designed to study the turning points or problematic situations in which people find themselves during transition periods (Borgatta & Borgatta, 1992).

Thus, postmodernism is characterized by a number of interrelated characteristics rather than by a single definition (Thomas, 1993), and this thinking attunes empirical social researchers to the assumptions underlying their own empiricism and encourages a reading of all qualitative narratives as rhetoric, a certain state of social being (Agger, 1991). These interrelated characteristics can form, for example, the

ideological base for ethnographies, biographies, or case studies. For example, regarding a "postmodern-influenced ethnography," Thomas (1993) writes that such a study might "confront the centrality of media-created realities and the influence of information technologies" (p. 25). Thomas also comments that narrative texts need to be challenged (and written), according to the postmodernists, for their "subtexts" of dominant meanings, a topic I address further in Chapter 9.

The postmodern perspective challenges meta-narratives or theories and is considered a "post-theory" perspective (Bloland, 1995). However, the postmodern perspective has found application in qualitative research through "solutions" (Bloland, 1995), and two are mentioned here: critical theory and feminist theory. These approaches form a conceptual lens for designing a qualitative study. Investigators might employ critical theory to bring about planned change, and feminist researchers might explore issues of gender and marginalization (for other types, such as Marxist and ethnic approaches, see Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Although these solutions may support themes of postmodern thinking, not all critical theorists and feminist writers consider themselves postmodernist, and their solutions depart from postmodern thinking in the form of action-oriented research and their support for meta-narratives or theories.

Critical Theory

Critical theory first developed from the thinking of a group of German scholars in the 1920s, collectively called the Frankfurt School (Morrow & Brown, 1994). Variants of **critical theory** abound in all of the social science disciplines, but central themes that a critical researcher might explore include the scientific study of social institutions and their transformations through interpreting the meanings of social life; the historical problems of domination, alienation, and social struggles; and a critique of society and the envisioning of new possibilities (Fay, 1987; Morrow & Brown, 1994). These themes have methodological implications, and they privilege some methods over others. As Morrow and Brown (1994) claim,

As a research program ultimately linked to a critical-emancipatory knowledge interest, critical theory is distinguished clearly by a distinctive approach to methodology as a set of metatheoretical assumptions and privileged research design strategies, a core set of substantive commitments related to the analysis of crisis tendencies in advanced capitalism, and an explicit approach to normative theory and its relation to critique of ideologies. (p. 242)

What is this "distinctive approach to methodology"? Critical theory can be "defined by the particular configuration of methodological postures it embraces" (p. 241). The critical researcher might, for example, design an ethnographic study to include changes in how people think, encourage people to interact, form networks and action-oriented groups, and help individuals examine the conditions of their existence (Thomas, 1993). The end goal of the study might be social theorizing, which Morrow and Brown define as "the desire to comprehend and, in some case, transform (through praxis) the underlying orders of social life—those social and systemic relations that constitute society" (p. 211). The investigator accomplishes this, for example, through an intensive case study or across a small number of historically comparable cases of specific actors (biographies), mediations, or systems and through "ethnographic accounts (interpretive social psychology), componential taxonomies (cognitive anthropology), and formal models (mathematical sociology)" (p. 212). In critical action research in teacher education, for example, Kincheloe (1991) recommends the following steps:

1. The teacher looks for philosophical guidance for his or her research and teaching from perspectives of critical theory, feminist theory, postmodern analysis, liberation theology, Deweyan educational theory, Afrocentric epistemology, or indigenous people's knowledge.
2. The "critical teacher" then exposes the assumptions of existing research orientations, critiques of the knowledge base, and through these critiques reveals ideological effects on teachers, schools, and the culture's view of education.
3. The researcher then selects what to study—to see the schools and classrooms from unique angles.