2

Philosophical, Paradigm, and Interpretive Frameworks

The research design process in qualitative research begins with philosophical assumptions that the inquirers make in deciding to undertake a qualitative study. In addition, researchers bring their own worldviews, paradigms, or sets of beliefs to the research project, and these inform the conduct and writing of the qualitative study. Further, in many approaches to qualitative research, the researchers use interpretive and theoretical frameworks to further shape the study. Good research requires making these assumptions, paradigms, and frameworks explicit in the writing of a study, and, at a minimum, to be aware that they influence the conduct of inquiry. The purpose of this chapter is to make explicit the assumptions made when one chooses to conduct qualitative research, the worldviews or paradigms available in qualitative research, and the diverse interpretive and theoretical frameworks that shape the content of a qualitative project.

Five philosophical assumptions lead to an individual's choice of qualitative research: ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetorical, and methodological assumptions. The qualitative researcher chooses a stance on each of these assumptions, and the choice has practical implications for designing and conducting research. Although the paradigms of research continually evolve, four will be mentioned that represent the beliefs of researchers that they bring to qualitative research: postpositivism, constructivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism. Each represents a different paradigm for making claims about knowledge, and the characteristics of each differ considerably. Again,

the practice of research is informed. Finally, the chapter will address theoretical frameworks, those interpretive communities that have developed within qualitative research that informs specific procedures of research. Several of these frameworks will be discussed: postmodern theories, feminist research, critical theory and critical race theory, queer theory, and disability inquiry. The three elements discussed above—assumptions, paradigms, and interpretive frameworks—often overlap and reinforce each other. For the purposes of our discussion, they will be discussed separately.

Questions for Discussion

- When qualitative researchers chose a qualitative study, what philosophical assumptions are being implicitly acknowledged?
- When qualitative researchers bring their beliefs to qualitative research, what alternative paradigm stances are they likely to use?
- When qualitative researchers select a framework as a lens for their study, what interpretive or theoretical frameworks are they likely to use?
- In the practice of designing or conducting qualitative research, how are assumptions, paradigms, and interpretive and/or theoretical frameworks used?

Philosophical Assumptions

In the choice of qualitative research, inquirers make certain assumptions. These philosophical assumptions consist of a stance toward the nature of reality (ontology), how the researcher knows what she or he knows (epistemology), the role of values in the research (axiology), the language of research (rhetoric), and the methods used in the process (methodology) (Creswell, 2003). These assumptions, shown in Table 2.1, 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 qualitative or naturalistic assumptions with conventional or positive assumptions as they do, acknowledging that today qualitative research is legitimate in its own right and does not need to be compared 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 in an attempt to bridge philosophy and practice.

The *ontological* issue relates to the nature of reality and its characteristics. When researchers conduct qualitative research, they are embracing the idea of multiple realities. Different researchers embrace different realities, as

Table 2.1   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 his or her own interpretation in conjunction with the interpretations 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

do also the individuals being studied and the readers of a qualitative study. When studying individuals, qualitative researchers conduct a study with the intent of reporting these multiple realities. Evidence of multiple realities includes the use of multiple quotes based on the actual words of different individuals and presenting different perspectives from individuals. When writers compile a phenomenology, they report how individuals participating in the study view their experiences differently (Moustakas, 1994).

With the *epistemological* assumption, conducting a qualitative study means that researchers try to get as close as possible to the participants being studied. In practice, qualitative researchers conduct their studies in the "field," where the participants live and work—these are important contexts for understanding what the participants are saying. The longer researchers stay in the "field" or get to know the participants, the more they "know what they know" from firsthand information. A good ethnography requires prolonged stay at the research site (Wolcott, 1999). 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.

All researchers bring values to a study, but qualitative researchers like to make explicit those values. This is the *axiological* assumption that characterizes qualitative research. How does the researcher implement this assumption in practice? In a qualitative study, the inquirers admit the value-laden nature of the study and actively report their values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered from the field. We say that they "position themselves" in a study. 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 (Denzin, 1989a).

Researchers are notorious for providing labels and names for aspects of qualitative methods (Koro-Ljungberg & Greckhamer, 2005). There is a rhetoric for the discourse of qualitative research that has evolved over time. Qualitative researchers tend to embrace the *rhetorical* assumption that the writing needs to be personal and literary in form. For example, they use metaphors, they refer to themselves using the first-person pronoun, "I," and they tell stories with a beginning, middle, and end, sometimes crafted chronologically, as in narrative research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Instead of using quantitative 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) or "validation" (Angen, 2000), as well as naturalistic generalizations (Stake, 1995). Words such as "understanding," "discover," and "meaning" form

the glossary of emerging qualitative terms (see Schwandt, 2001) and are important rhetorical markers in writing purpose statements and research questions (as discussed later). The language of the qualitative researcher becomes personal, literary, and based on definitions that evolve during a study rather than being defined by the researcher. Seldom does one see an extensive "Definition of Terms" section in a qualitative study, because the terms as defined by participants are of primary importance.

The procedures of qualitative research, or its methodology, are characterized as inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher's experience in collecting and analyzing the data. The logic that the qualitative researcher follows is inductive, from the ground up, rather than handed down entirely from a theory or from the perspectives of the inquirer. Sometimes the research questions change in the middle of the study to reflect better the types of questions needed to understand the research problem. In response, 'the data collection strategy, planned before the study, needs to be modified to accompany the new questions. During the data analysis, the researcher follows a path of analyzing the data to develop an increasingly detailed knowledge of the topic being studied.

Paradigms or Worldviews

The assumptions reflect a particular stance that researchers make when they choose qualitative research. After researchers make this choice, they then further shape their research by bringing to the inquiry paradigms or worldviews. A *paradigm or worldview* is "a basic set of beliefs that guide action" (Guba, 1990, p. 17). These beliefs have been called paradigms (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Mertens, 1998); philosophical assumptions, epistemologies, and ontologies (Crotty, 1998); broadly conceived research methodologies (Neuman, 2000); and alternative knowledge claims (Creswell, 2003). Paradigms used by qualitative researchers vary with the set of beliefs they bring to research, and the types have continually evolved over time (contrast the paradigms of Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, with the paradigms of Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Individuals may also use multiple paradigms in their qualitative research that are compatible, such as constructionist and participatory worldviews (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

In this discussion, I focus on four worldviews that inform qualitative research and identify how these worldviews shape the practice of research. The four are postpositivism, constructivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism (Creswell, 2003). It is helpful to see the major elements of each paradigm, and how they inform the practice of research differently.

Postpositivism

Those who engage in qualitative research using a belief system grounded in postpositivism will take a scientific approach to research. The approach has the elements of being reductionistic, logical, an emphasis on empirical data collection, cause-and-effect oriented, and deterministic based on a priori theories. We can see this approach at work among individuals with prior quantitative research training, and in fields such as the health sciences in which qualitative research is a new approach to research and must be couched in terms acceptable to quantitative researchers and funding agents (e.g., the a priori use of theory; see Barbour, 2000). A good overview of postpostivist approaches is available in Phillips and Burbules (2000).

In terms of practice, postpositivist researchers will likely view inquiry as a series of logically related steps, believe in multiple perspectives from participants rather than a single reality, and espouse rigorous methods of qualitative data collection and analysis. They will use multiple levels of data analysis for rigor, employ computer programs to assist in their analysis, encourage the use of validity approaches, and write their qualitative studies in the form of scientific reports, with a structure resembling quantitative approaches (e.g., problem, questions, data collection, results, conclusions). My approach to qualitative research has been identified as belonging to postpositivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), as have the approaches of others (e.g., Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). I do tend to use this belief system, although I would not characterize all of my research as framed within a postpositivist qualitative orientation (e.g., see the constructivist approach in McVea, Harter, McEntarffer, and Creswell, 1999, and the social justice perspective in Miller and Creswell, 1998). In their discussion here of the five approaches, for example, I emphasize the systematic procedures of grounded theory found in Strauss and Corbin (1990), the analytic steps in phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994), and the alternative analysis strategies of Yin (2003).

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism (which is often combined with interpretivism; see Mertens, 1998) is another worldview. In this worldview, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences—meanings directed toward certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories or ideas. The goal of research, then, is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation. Often these

subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. In other words, they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through inter-action with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives. Rather than starting with a theory (as in postpositivism), inquirers generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning. Examples of recent writers who have summarized this position are Crotty (1998), Lincoln and Guba (2000), Schwandt (2001), and Neuman (2000).

In terms of practice, the questions become broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation, a meaning typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons. The more open-ended the questioning, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life setting. Thus, constructivist researchers often address the "processes" of interaction among individuals. They also focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants. Researchers recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they "position themselves" in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences. Thus the researchers make an interpretation of what they find, an interpretation shaped by their own experiences and background. The researcher's intent, then, is to make sense (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world. This is why qualitative research is often called "interpretive" research.

In the discussion here of the five approaches, we will see the constructivist worldview manifest in phenomenological studies, in which individuals describe their experiences (Moustakas, 1994), and in the grounded theory perspective of Charmaz (2006), in which she grounds her theoretical orientation in the views or perspectives of individuals.

Advocacy/Participatory

Researchers might use an alternative worldview, advocacy/participatory, because the postpositivist imposes structural laws and theories that do not fit marginalized individuals or groups and the constructivists do not go far enough in advocating for action to help individuals. The basic tenet of this worldview is that research should contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of participants, the institutions in which they live and work, or even the researchers' lives. The issues facing these marginalized groups are of paramount importance to study, issues such as oppression, domination, suppression, alienation, and hegemony. As these issues are studied and exposed, the researchers provide a voice for these participants,

raising their consciousness and improving their lives. Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998) summarize the key features of advocacy/participatory practice:

- Participatory action is recursive or dialectical and is focused on bringing about change in practices. Thus, at the end of advocacy/participatory studies, researchers advance an action agenda for change.
- It is focused on helping individuals free themselves from constraints found in the media, in language, in work procedures, and in the relationships of power in educational settings. Advocacy/participatory studies often begin with an important issue or stance about the problems in society, such as the need for empowerment.
- It is emancipatory in that it helps unshackle people from the constraints of irrational and unjust structures that limit self-development and self-determination. The aim of advocacy/participatory studies is to create a political debate and discussion so that change will occur.
- It is practical and collaborative because it is inquiry completed "with" others rather than "on" or "to" others. In this spirit, advocacy/participatory authors engage the participants as active collaborators in their inquiries.

Other researchers that embrace this worldview are Fay (1987) and Heron and Reason (1997).

In practice, this worldview has shaped several approaches to inquiry. Specific social issues (e.g., domination, oppression, inequity) help frame the research questions. Not wanting to further marginalize the individuals participating in the research, advocacy/participatory inquirers collaborate with research participants. They may ask participants to help with designing the questions, collecting the data, analyzing it, and shaping the final report of the research. In this way, the "voice" of the participants becomes heard throughout the research process. The research also contains an action agenda for reform, a specific plan for addressing the injustices of the marginalized group. These practices will be seen in the ethnographic approaches to research found in Denzin and Lincoln (2005) and in the advocacy tone of some forms of narrative research (Angrosino, 1994).

Pragmatism

There are many forms of pragmatism. Individuals holding this worldview focus on the outcomes of the research—the actions, situations, and consequences of inquiry—rather than antecedent conditions (as in postpositivism). There is a concern with applications—"what works"—and solutions to problems (Patton, 1990). Thus, instead of a focus on methods, the important aspect of research is the problem being studied and the questions asked

about this problem (see Rossman & Wilson, 1985). Cherryholmes (1992) and Murphy (1990) provide direction for the basic ideas:

- Pragmatism is not committed to any one system of philosophy and reality.
- Individual researchers have a freedom of choice. They are "free" to choose the methods, techniques, and procedures of research that best meet their needs and purposes.
- Pragmatists do not see the world as an absolute unity. In a similar way, mixed methods researchers look to many approaches to collecting and analyzing data rather than subscribing to only one way (e.g., quantitative or qualitative).
- Truth is what works at the time; it is not based in a dualism between reality independent of the mind or within the mind.
- Pragmatist researchers look to the "what" and "how" to research based on its intended consequences—where they want to go with it.
- Pragmatists agree that research always occurs in social, historical, political, and other contexts.
- Pragmatists have believed in an external world independent of the mind as well as those lodged in the mind. But they believe (Cherryholmes, 1992) that we need to stop asking questions about reality and the laws of nature. "They would simply like to change the subject" (Rorty, 1983, p. xiv.)
- Recent writers embracing this worldview include Rorty (1990), Murphy (1990), Patton (1990), Cherryholmes (1992), and Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003).

In practice, the individual using this worldview will use multiple methods of data collection to best answer the research question, will employ both quantitative and qualitative sources of data collection, will focus on the practical implications of the research, and will emphasize the importance of conducting research that best addresses the research problem. In the discussion here of the five approaches to research, you will see this worldview at work when ethnographers employ both quantitative (e.g., surveys) and qualitative data collection (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) and when case study researchers use both quantitative and qualitative data (Luck, Jackson, & Usher, 2006; Yin, 2003).

Interpretive Communities

Operating at a less philosophical level are various interpretive communities for qualitative researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Each community mentioned below is a community with a distinct body of literature and unique issues of discussion. Space does not permit doing justice here to the scope and issues raised by interpretive communities. However, at the end of this chapter, I advance several readings that can extend and probe in more detail

the interpretive communities' stances. Also, throughout the approaches to qualitative research discussed in this book, I will interweave research procedures and specific journal articles that use interpretive approaches. Our focus in this discussion will be on how interpretive lenses impact the process of research across the different interpretive communities. Although qualitative researchers use *social sciences theories* to frame their theoretical lens in studies, such as the use of these theories in ethnography (see Chapter 4), our discussion will be limited to the interpretive lens related to societal issues and issues influencing marginalized or underrepresented groups.

Interpretive positions provide a pervasive lens or perspective on all aspects of a qualitative research project. The participants in these interpretive projects represent underrepresented or marginalized groups, whether those differences take the form of gender, race, class, religion, sexuality, and geography (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005) or some intersection of these differences. The problems and the research questions explored aim to understanding specific issues or topics—the conditions that serve to disadvantage and exclude individuals or cultures, such as hierarchy, hegemony, racism, sexism, unequal power relations, identity, or inequities in our society.

In addition, the procedures of research, such as data collection, data analysis, representing the material to audiences, and standards of evaluation and ethics, emphasize an interpretive stance. During data collection, the researcher does not further marginalize the participants, but respects the participants and the sites for research. Further, researchers provide reciprocity by giving or paying back those who participate in research, and they focus on the multiple-perspective stories of individuals and who tells the stories. Researchers are also sensitive to power imbalances during all facets of the research process. They respect individual differences rather than employing the traditional aggregation of categories such as men and women, or Hispanics or African Americans. Ethical practices of the researchers recognize the importance of the subjectivity of their own lens, acknowledge the powerful position they have in the research, and admit that the participants or the co-construction of the account between the researchers and the participants are the true owners of the information collected.

How the research is presented and used also is important. The research may be presented in traditional ways, such as journal articles, or in experimental approaches, such as theater or poetry. Using an interpretive lens may also lead to the call for action and transformation—the aims of social justice—in which the qualitative project ends with distinct steps of reform and an incitement to action.

Based on these core ideas, several theoretical perspectives will be reviewed: the postmodern perspective, feminist theories, critical theory and critical race theory (CRT), queer theory, and disability theories.

Postmodern Perspectives

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). 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. The conditions include the importance of different discourses, the importance of marginalized people and groups (the "other"), and the presence of "meta-narratives" or universals that hold true regardless of the social conditions. Also included are the need to "deconstruct" texts in terms of language, their reading and their writing, and the examining and bringing to the surface concealed hierarchies as well as dominations, oppositions, inconsistencies, and contradictions (Bloland, 1995; Clarke, 2005; Stringer, 1993). Denzin's (1989a) approach to "interpretive" biography, Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) approach to narrative research, and Clarke's (2005) perspective on grounded theory draw on postmodernism in that researchers study turning points, or problematic situations in which people find themselves during transition periods (Borgatta & Borgatta, 1992). 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.

Feminist Theories

Feminism draws on different theoretical and pragmatic orientations, different national contexts, and dynamic developments (Olesen, 2005). *Feminist research approaches* center and make problematic women's diverse situations and the institutions that frame those situations. Research topics may include policy issues related to realizing social justice for women in specific contexts and knowledge about oppressive situations for women (Olesen, 2005). The theme of domination prevails in the feminist literature as well, but the subject matter is gender domination within a patriarchal society. Feminist research also embraces many of the tenets of postmodern

critiques as a challenge to current society. In feminist research approaches, the goals are to establish collaborative and nonexploitative relationships, to place the researcher within the study so as to avoid objectification, and to conduct research that is transformative. It is a complex area of inquiry, with numerous frameworks (e.g., male oriented, white feminist oriented, able-bodied female oriented) and difficult issues (e.g., the absence and invisibility of women, who can be "knowers") (Olesen, 2005).

One of the leading scholars of this approach, Lather (1991), comments on the essential perspectives of this framework. Feminist researchers see gender as a basic organizing principle that shapes the conditions of their lives. It is "a lens that brings into focus particular questions" (Fox-Keller, 1985, p. 6). The questions feminists pose relate to the centrality of gender in the shaping of our consciousness. The aim of this ideological research is to "correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position" (Lather, 1991, p. 71). Another writer, Stewart (1994), translates feminist critiques and methodology into procedural guides. She suggests that researchers need to look for what has been left out in social science writing, and to study women's lives and issues such as identities, sex roles, domestic violence, abortion activism, comparable worth, affirmative action, and the way in which women struggle with their social devaluation and powerlessness within their families. Also, researchers need to consciously and systematically include their own roles or positions and assess how they impact their understandings of a woman's life. In addition, Stewart views women as having agency, the ability to make choices and resist oppression, and she suggests that researchers need to inquire into how a woman understands her gender, acknowledging that gender is a social contract that differs for each individual. Stewart highlights the importance of studying power relationships and individuals' social position and how they impact women. Finally, she sees each woman as different and recommends that scholars avoid the search for a unified or coherent self or voice.

Recent discussions indicate that the approach of finding appropriate methods for feminist research has given way to the thought that any method can be made feminist (Deem, 2002; Moss, 2006). The focus on feminist-oriented methods is a fruitless one; rather, the focus, as noted by Olesen (2005), needs to be on topics such as what feminist knowledge might look like, with questions including whose knowledge it is and where and how is it obtained, by whom, and for what purposes. Olesen further explains some of the issues feminist researchers are addressing today, such as the feminist researcher as objective with insider knowledge; the need to uncover the hidden or unrecognized elements in a researcher's background; the credibility, trustworthiness, and validity of researchers' accounts; the reporting of

women's voices without exploiting or distorting them; the use of experimentation in presentation, such as in performance pieces, dramatic readings, and plays; and ethical issues of care, establishing positive relationships with participants, and recognizing power and ownership of materials. In short, rather than a focus on methods, the discussions have now turned to how to use the methods in a self-disclosing and respectful way.

Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical theory perspectives are concerned with empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender (Fay, 1987). Researchers need to acknowledge their own power, engage in dialogues, and use theory to interpret or illuminate social action (Madison, 2005). 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).

In research, critical theory can be "defined by the particular configuration of methodological postures it embraces" (p. 241). The critical researcher might design, for example, an ethnographic study to include changes in how people think; encourage people to interact, form networks, become activists, and action-oriented groups; and help individuals examine the conditions of their existence (Madison, 2005; Thomas, 1993). The end goal of the study might be social theorizing, which Morrow and Brown (1994) define as "the desire to comprehend and, in some cases, 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 that the "critical teacher" 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. The design of research within a critical theory approach, according to sociologist Agger (1991), falls into two broad categories: *methodological,* in that it affects the ways in which people write and read, and *substantive,* in the theories and topics of the investigator (e.g., theorizing about the role of the state and culture in

advanced capitalism). An often-cited classic of critical theory is the ethnography from Willis (1977) of the "lads" who participated in behavior as opposition to authority, as informal groups "having a laff" (p. 29) as a form of resistance to their school. As a study of the manifestations of resistance and state regulation, it highlights ways in which actors come to terms with and struggle against cultural forms that dominate them (Morrow & Brown, 1994). Resistance is also the theme addressed in the ethnography of a subcultural group of youths highlighted as an example of ethnography in this book (see Haenfler, 2004).

Critical race theory (CRT) focuses theoretical attention on race and how racism is deeply embedded within the framework of American society (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Racism has directly shaped the U.S. legal system and the ways people think about the law, racial categories, and privilege (Harris, 1993). According to Parker and Lynn (2002), CRT has three main goals. Its first goal is to present stories about discrimination from the perspective of people of color. These may be qualitative case studies of descriptions and interviews. These cases may then be drawn together to build cases against racially biased officials or discrminatory practices. Since many stories advance White privilege through "majoritiarian" master narratives, counter-stories by people of color can help to shatter the complacency that may accompany such privilege and challenge the dominant discourses that serve to suppress people on the margins of society (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). As a second goal, CRT argues for the eradication of racial subjugation while simultaneously recognizing that race is a social construct (Parker & Lynn, 2002). In this view, race is not a fixed term, but one that is fluid and continually shaped by political pressures and informed by individual lived experiences. Finally, the third goal of CRT addresses other areas of difference, such as gender, class, and any inequities experienced by individuals. As Parker and Lynn (2002) comment: "In the case of Black women, race does not exist outside of gender and gender does not exist outside of race" (p. 12). In research, the use of CRT methodology means that the researcher foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process; challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of people of color; and offers transformative solutions to racial, gender, and class subordination in our societal and institutional structures.

Queer Theory

Queer theory is characterized by a variety of methods and strategies relating to individual identity (Watson, 2005). As a body of literature continuing to evolve, it explores the myriad complexities of the construct, identity, and

how identities reproduce and "perform" in social forums. Writers also use a postmodern or poststructural orientation to critique and deconstruct dominant theories (a "radical deconstruction," Plummer, 2005, p. 359) related to identity (Watson, 2005). They focus on how it is culturally and historically constituted, linked to discourse, and overlaps gender and sexuality. The term itself—"queer theory," rather than gay, lesbian, or homosexual theory—allows for keeping open to question the elements of race, class, age, and anything else (Turner, 2000). Most queer theorists work to challenge and undercut identity as singular, fixed, or normal (Watson, 2005). They also seek to challenge categorization processes and their deconstructions, rather than focus on specific populations. The historical binary distinctions are inadequate to describe sexual identity. Plummer (2005) provides a concise overview of the queer theory stance:

- Both the heterosexual/homosexual binary and the sex/gender split are challenged.
- There is a decentering of identity.
- All sexual categories (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, heterosexual) are open, fluid, and nonfixed.
- Mainstream homosexuality is critiqued.
- Power is embodied discursively.
- All normalizing strategies are shunned.
- Academic work may become ironic, and often comic and paradoxical.
- Versions of homosexual subject positions are inscribed everywhere.
- Deviance is abandoned, and interest lies in insider and outsider perspectives and transgressions.
- Common objects of study are films, videos, novels, poetry, and visual images.
- The most frequent interests include the social worlds of the so-called radical sexual fringe (e.g, drag kings and queens, sexual playfulness).

Although queer theory is less a methodology and more a focus of inquiry, queer methods often find expression in a rereading of cultural texts (e.g., films, literature); ethnographies and case studies of sexual worlds that challenge assumptions; data sources that contain multiple texts; documentaries that include performances; and projects that focus on individuals (Plummer, 2005). Queer theorists have engaged in research and/or political activities such as ACT-UP and QUEER NATION around HIV/AIDS awareness, as well as artistic and cultural representations of art and theater aimed at disrupting or rendering unnatural and strange practices that are taken for granted. These representations convey the voices and experiences of individuals who have been suppressed (Gamson, 2000). Useful readings about queer theory are found in the journal article overview provided by Watson

(2005) and the chapter by Plummer (2005), and in key books, such the book by Tierney (1997).

Disability Theories

Disability inquiry addresses the meaning of inclusion in schools and encompasses administrators, teachers, and parents who have children with disabilities (Mertens, 1998). Mertens recounts how disability research has moved through stages of development, from the medical model of disability (sickness and the role of the medical community in threatening it) to an environmental response to individuals with a disability. Now, researchers focus more on disability as a dimension of human difference and not as a defect. As a human difference, its meaning is derived from social construction (i.e., society's response to individuals) and it is simply one dimension of human difference (Mertens, 2003). Viewing individuals with disabilities as different is reflected in the research process, such as in the types of questions asked, the labels applied to these individuals, considerations of how the data collection will benefit the community, the appropriateness of communication methods, and how the data are reported in a way that is respectful of power relationships.

Summary

In this chapter, I situated qualitative research within the larger discussion about philosophical, paradigmatic, and interpretive frameworks that investigators bring to their studies. It is a complex area, and one that I can only begin to sketch with some clarity. I see, however, that the basic philosophical assumptions relate to ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetoric, and methodology as central features of all qualitative studies. Researchers take a philosophical stance on each of these assumptions when they decide to undertake a qualitative study. They also bring to the research their paradigms or worldviews, and those frequently used by qualitative researchers consist of postpositivist, constructivist, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatist. These worldviews, in turn, narrow to interpretive or theoretical stances taken by the researcher. These interpretive stances shape the individuals studied; the types of questions and problems examined; the approaches to data collection, data analysis, writing, and evaluation; and the use of the information to change society or add to social justice. Some of the interpretive stances used in qualitative research include postmodernism, feminist research, critical theory and critical race theory, queer theory, and disability

theory. Thinking related to the philosophical assumptions, paradigms or worldview, and interpretive stances will be threaded throughout our exploration of the five approaches.

Additional Readings

Several writers, in addition to Guba and Lincoln (1988, 2005), discuss the paradigm assumptions of qualitative research. In counseling psychology, Hoshmand (1989) reviews these assumptions. In education, see Sparkes (1992) or Cunningham and Fitzgerald (1996). In management, see Burrell and Morgan (1979) or Gioia and Pitre (1990).

Burrell, G., & Morgan, G. (1979). *Sociological paradigms and organizational analysis*. London: Heinemann.

Cunningham, J. W., & Fitzgerald, J. (1996). Epistemology and reading. *Reading Research Quarterly, 31*(1), 36–60.

Gioia, D. A., & Pitre, E. (1990). Multiparadigm perspectives on theory building. *Management Review, 15;* 584–602.

Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1988). Do inquiry paradigms imply inquiry methodologies? In D. M. Fetterman (Ed.), *Qualitative approaches to evaluation in education* (pp. 89–115). New York: Praeger.

Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 191–215). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hoshmand, L. L. S. T. (1989). Alternative research paradigms: A review and teaching proposal. *The Counseling Psychologist, 17*(1), 3–79.

Sparkes, A. C. (1992). The paradigms debate: An extended review and celebration of differences. In A. C. Sparkes (Ed.), *Research in physical education and sport: Exploring alternative visions* (pp. 9–60). London: Falmer Press.

For an introduction to postmodern thinking in the social sciences, see Rosenau (1992), Slife and Williams (1995), Clarke (2005), and the journal article by Bloland (1995).

Bloland, H. G. (1995). Postmodernism and higher education. *Journal of Higher Education, 66,* 521–559.

Clarke, A. E. (2005). *Situational analysis: Grounded theory after the postmodern turn*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rosenau, P. M. (1992). *Post-modernism and the social sciences: Insights, inroads, and intrusions*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Slife, B. D., & Williams, R. N. (1995). *What's behind the research? Discovering hidden assumptions in the behavioral sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

For critical theory and critical race theory, see the following articles, which provide an introduction to the subject: Bloland (1995), Agger (1991), and Carspecken and Apple (1992). For book-length works, see Morrow and Brown (1994), a useful book for drawing the connection between critical theory and methodology. Other book-length works that take the critical theory discussion into ethnography are Thomas (1993) and Madison (2005). For critical race theory, examine Parker and Lynn (2002) and Solorzano and Yosso (2002).

Agger, B. (1991). Critical theory, poststructuralism, postmodernism: Their sociological relevance. In W. R. Scott & J. Blake (Eds.), *Annual review of sociology* (Vol. 17, pp. 105–131). Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews.

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Carspecken, P. F., & Apple, M. (1992). Critical qualitative research: Theory, methodology, and practice. In M. L. LeCompte, W. L. Millroy, & J. Preissle (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research in education* (pp. 507–553). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Madison, D. S. (2005). *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Morrow, R. A., & Brown, D. D. (1994). *Critical theory and methodology.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Parker, L., & Lynn, M. (2002). What race got to do with it? Critical race theory's conflicts with and connections to qualitative research methodology and epistemology. *Qualitative Inquiry, 8*(1), 7–22.

Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 8*(1), 23–44.

Thomas, J. (1993). *Doing critical ethnography.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

For an introduction to feminist research and social science methods, see the articles or chapters by Roman (1992), Olesen (1994, 2005), Stewart (1994), and Moss (2006). For book-length works, examine Harding (1987), Nielsen (1990), Lather (1991), Reinharz (1992), and Ferguson and Wicke (1994).

Ferguson, M., & Wicke, J. (1994). *Feminism and postmodernism.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Harding, S. (1987). *Feminism and methodology.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Lather, P. (1991). *Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy within the postmodern.* New York: Routledge.

Moss, P. (2006). Emergent methods in feminist research. In S. N. Hesse-Biber (Ed.), *Handbook of feminist research methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Nielsen, J. M. (Ed.). (1990). *Feminist research methods: Exemplary readings in the social sciences*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Olesen, V. (1994). Feminisms and models of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 158–174). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Olesen, V. (2005). Early millennial feminist qualitative research: Challenges and contours. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 235–278). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Reinharz, S. (1992). *Feminist methods in social research*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Roman, L. G. (1992). The political significance of other ways of narrating ethnography: A feminist materialist approach. In M. L. LeCompte, W. L. Millroy, & J. Preissle (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research in education* (pp. 555–594). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Stewart, A. J. (1994). Toward a feminist strategy for studying women's lives. In C. E. Franz & A. J. Stewart (Eds.), *Women creating lives: Identities, resilience and resistance* (pp. 11–35). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

For a recent introduction to queer theory and its applications in the social sciences and sociology, see:

Tierney, W. G. (1997). *Academic outlaws: Queer theory and cultural studies in the academy*. London: Sage.

Valocchi, S. (2005). Not yet queer enough: The lessons of queer theory for the sociology of gender and sexuality. *Gender & Society, 19*(6), 750–770.

Watson, K. (2005). Queer theory. *Group Analysis, 38*(1), 67–81.

For an overview of disability theories, see:

Mertens, D. M. (2003). Mixed methods and the politics of human research: The transformative-emancipatory perspective. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research* (pp. 135–164). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Exercises

1. In the study you are planning to conduct, you may or may not use an interpretive perspective. It is good practice to consider how you might design this component into your proposed study. Take the study that you would like to design, and select a postmodern, feminist, critical race theory, queer theory, or disability perspective. Discuss how this interpretive stance will shape the

participants selected, the issues explored, the modes of data collection, and the use of the study.

2. Take the five philosophical assumptions and design a matrix like Table 2.1 that includes a column for how you plan to address each assumption in your proposed study.

3. Select a postpositivist, constructivist, advocacy/participatory, or pragmatic worldview for your study. Discuss the ways that this worldview will inform the design of your study.