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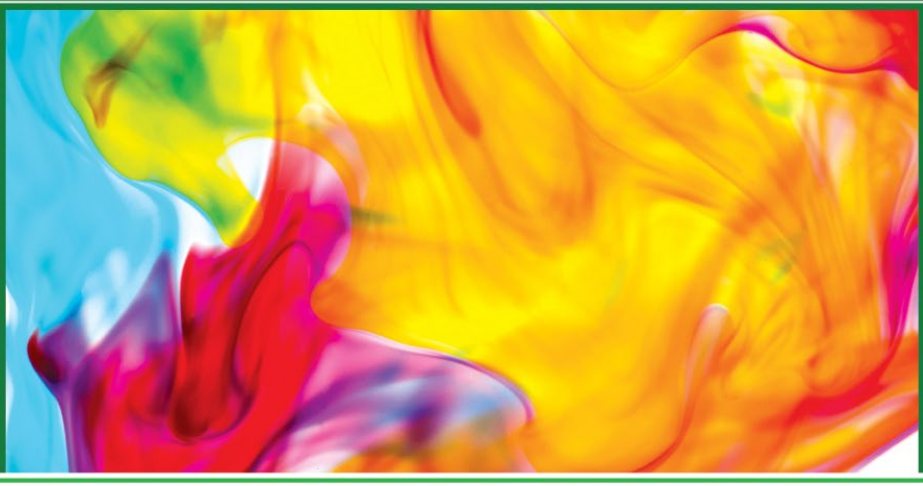
QUALITATIVE COMMUNICATION RESEARCH METHODS



Thomas R. Lindlof
Bryan C. Taylor

Qualitative Communication Research Methods

Fourth Edition

To the memory of Buddy and Nick, for whom it was indeed a Way of Life.

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Fourth Edition

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Preface

As with the first three editions of *Qualitative Communication Research Methods* (*QCRM*), this volume is designed to introduce readers to qualitative research and its role in generating knowledge about communication. Our logic in this endeavor is to chart the journey undertaken by the qualitative researcher from conceptualizing to completing a study. In this process, we have made some strategic choices, partly out of necessity, partly out of preference. One choice involves a bias toward field methods. We have chosen not to treat the specific methodologies associated with discourse analysis because of their complexity. We refer the reader instead to the many excellent discussions available elsewhere (e.g., Boreus & Bergstrom, 2017; Wodak & Meyer, 2015). Otherwise, the qualitative researcher depicted here is one who employs a full range of methods and techniques. Chief among the methods explored in *QCRM* are participant-observation and interviewing, but visual media, mobile methods, document analysis, research diaries, maps and visualization exercises, and other tools are also treated herein. We know that some readers ultimately wish to use only some of these methods, based on their situational needs. Advanced readers may, as a result, wish to read selectively, but we believe that novices will benefit from taking the full ride. When you actually need them, it's better to have too many resources than not enough.

In general, the balance struck by this book involves responsibly representing the history and scope of qualitative research in communication while perceptively tracking new trends. We are sensitive to how these questions about qualitative research and communication play out in a dramatically changing environment shaping the form and content of academic and intellectual work in postmodern society. In this way, *QCRM* continues to speak ambitiously of—and perhaps *as*—communication as a vibrant, dynamic, and increasingly international academic field. It seeks to represent disciplinary diversity and to make informed judgments about the significance and consequences of recent trends.

Perhaps the most important change in this volume is our decision to add two new chapters. As the scope and complexity of communication subfields has expanded in recent years, we saw a commensurate need to show in greater detail how the practices and applications of qualitative research vary by topical area. Thus, we created a new Chapter 2, "The Diversity of Qualitative Research in Communication Subfields," from what was previously a section within the introductory chapter. The new structure provides a "one-stop-shopping" guide to the field's distinctive subfields and enables readers to identify the research agenda that best represents their own interests. Two rising subfields—political communication and communication activism—were added to the mix, resulting in a total of thirteen subfields covered. By enacting this change, we also lessened the burden on Chapter 1 so that it can better focus on the goals, definitions, and paradigms of qualitative inquiry in communication.

The second new chapter—Chapter 10, "Sensemaking II: Creating, Evaluating, and Enhancing Interpretations of Data"—arose from a perceived need to take the two major phases of data analysis that were formerly bundled in one chapter and give each of them room to "breathe" in separate chapters. We have, in effect, created a two-chapter suite of qualitative analysis methods. This strategy allows Chapter 9, "Sensemaking I: Analyzing, Coding, and Managing Data," to concentrate on the initial steps of analysis: retrieving, coding, and categorizing data; writing memos; leaving the field; and working with manual and computer-assisted tools. The conclusion of that chapter passes the baton to Chapter 10, where readers are introduced to the interpretation phase of analysis: theorizing and conceptualizing with data; constructing exemplars; evaluating data for reliability and validity; and enhancing research claims. The result of these newly configured chapters, we believe, is a clearer, more complete presentation of how researchers make sense of qualitative data.

All of the volume's chapters feature new examples of published research—and, in some instances, examples of our own and our students' research. These examples are chosen from across the varied subfields and publication outlets of communication. They are not intended to be definitive of the point being illustrated; rather, the examples are meant to stimulate, enlarge, sharpen, or challenge your thinking about the practice of research. We also attempted to use a more direct and personal writing style. To the extent that you, the reader, feel actively involved in a dialogue about the choices one makes in investigating communication, this effort was successful.

Major changes to individual chapters of the fourth edition of *QCRM* include the following:

Chapter 1. Introduction to Qualitative Communication Research. This chapter contains new discussion of two recent trends affecting qualitative studies: the "materialist turn" in communication theory and the rise of Big Data as a resource and paradigm for communication research. It preserves major sections from previous editions, but has updated all related discussion and examples.

Chapter 2. The Diversity of Qualitative Research in Communication Subfields. As noted above, this chapter has been separated from the first chapter that appeared in previous editions. This change is intended to help students focus on the chapter's survey of communication subfields and help them locate their research projects within their distinctive agendas. Two new subfields are covered in this chapter: communication activism and political communication. Updated discussion and examples are provided for all thirteen subfields covered.

Chapter 3. Theoretical Traditions and Qualitative Communication Research. This chapter includes a new "sandwich" metaphor designed to help students make good choices in combining epistemology, theory, and methods in their research projects. One new tradition has been included: Queer Theory. Updated discussion and examples are provided for the other thirteen traditions covered across the three major categories (Phenomenology; Social and Cultural Theories; Critical Theories).

Chapter 4. Design I: Planning Research Projects. This chapter has a significantly expanded section on a matter of great importance to novice researchers: how to formulate research ideas and questions. Other areas of coverage that profited from extensive updating include sections on the sources of research ideas and the process of assessing the feasibility of potential research projects.

Chapter 5. Design II: Implementing Research Projects. Key improvements to this chapter are found in the section "Exploratory and Mixed Methods," where new methods are introduced (mobile methods, digital self-report tools, visualization exercises), and the discussions of other methods has been updated and expanded. Issues regarding the ethics of using digital data sources have been added to the section on human subject protections.

Chapter 6. Producing Data I: Participation, Observation, and Recording Communication. This chapter includes a new discussion of using blogs and social media platforms to post fieldnotes and other multimedia data collected during fieldwork. All discussions of participant-observation roles and strategies have been updated, with particular focus on conducting fieldwork in mediated settings and using information and communication technologies.

Chapter 7. Producing Data II: Qualitative Interviewing. This chapter has been extensively updated in the sections on technologically mediated interview contexts (via video conferencing, e-mail, text messaging, etc.) and digital transcription. The section on question design has also been augmented with more

examples and deeper discussions about methods of asking (and responding to) participants about their lived experience.

Chapter 8. Producing Data III: Studying Materiality. Reflecting the recent material turn in communication theory (discussed in Chapter 1), this chapter has been transformed in several ways. The major sections on material culture and document analysis now include more detailed methodological procedures as well as subsections devoted to specific types of materiality and communication research. Additionally, issues of studying digital artifacts and documents are given greater prominence in this edition.

Chapter 9. Sensemaking I: Analyzing, Coding, and Managing Data. The major improvement to this chapter consists of a longer, more detailed treatment of the coding and categorization process of data analysis. Included in this treatment are new examples aimed at helping students perceive patterns in textual data and "stretch" their imaginations. We also updated the section on computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS).

Chapter 10. Sensemaking II: Creating, Evaluating, and Enhancing Interpretations of Data. This chapter has been separated from the eighth chapter that appeared in previous editions. This change is intended to help students focus on first mastering basic strategies of data analysis (e.g., categorizing and coding) before moving to more advanced strategies of interpretation. All elements from previous material have been retained, but thoroughly updated to include new examples and strategies for creating, evaluating, and enhancing interpretations of data.

Chapter 11. Writing, Authoring, and Publishing. No new units have been added for this chapter, but the updating of discussion and examples in all sections has been intensive—particularly regarding topics of the academic publishing industry and multimedia publication formats and strategies. The section previously titled "Alternative [Writing] Formats" has been renamed to "Innovative Writing Formats."

We conclude this Preface with acknowledgments of people who played important roles in the development of this volume. Here we speak for and about ourselves in the first person; in the rest of the volume, we write in the editorial *we,* except for those instances when Bryan or Tom relates an individual experience.

Tom: I am grateful for the opportunity to collaborate again with Bryan on *QCRM*. Every writing partnership is different, and ours is characterized by mutual respect, open communication, and shared responsibility for producing work that helps advance the cause of communication scholarship. Bryan himself is a rare breed—a brilliant analyst/writer and imaginative project co-director who doesn't care who gets the credit for an idea, as long as the idea is solid. I'd work with him again, anytime, anywhere. Second, I thank Joanne Lindlof for her encouragement and especially her patience

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Bryan: First, I thank Tom for our extended and fulfilling collaboration on these volumes, and for his long career of inspiring and mentoring students of qualitative communication research. It may seem like Tom is riding off into the Texas sunset, but the legacy of his fierce intelligence and spirit will continue in any future edition of this volume. Second, I thank my colleagues and students at the University of Colorado–Boulder, who constantly remind me why this project is important. Finally, I thank Kerry, Harold, and Wallace for their unflagging support. Sometimes, it takes a family.

We have enjoyed working with SAGE in the development and production of this edition. In particular, we wish to thank acquisitions editor Karen Omer (and her predecessor, Matt Byrnie), editorial assistant Sarah Dillard, production editor Bennie Clark Allen, and copy editor Lana Arndt. We also appreciate the input from the reviewers of our book proposal: Michael Arrington (Indiana State University), Anders Hansen (University of Leicester), Sylvie Magerstädt (University of Hertfordshire), Jessica S. Robles (University of Washington), and Martina Topić (Leeds Beckett University). We hope this volume satisfies their expectations—and yours.

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1

Introduction to Qualitative Communication Research

Working With Cops: One Story of Qualitative Research

It's not like Elizabeth woke up one day and suddenly decided to study police officers, thinking about how organizational communication shaped their professional identities. That would come later. Instead, it all began with an unexpected coincidence of access and interest, and a nagging feeling that something important was happening.

Elizabeth was a Communication major at a large public university located in the western United States, and she had chosen to write a senior honors thesis. Early in the year, at the urging of the program's director, she began to consider her options for a topic to study, and a place (or "site") to study it. In this process, she realized that her part-time job with the university's police department was worth considering. In 2 years of working for its operations division, she had become steeped in the daily routines of the officers and the civilian staff. She had learned how their communication with students, residents of the surrounding city, and members of other law enforcement agencies was influenced both by formal policies and informal norms. As she performed her official job duties, and engaged in casual conversations, Elizabeth noticed that the officers expressed both intense *pride and frustration* about their work. Over time, her attention to these expressions deepened as she began to date one of the officers and to socialize with them outside of work.

Because of her unique status, Elizabeth enjoyed a level of trust in this group that was rarely offered to outsiders. And there was something persistently interesting about how the officers communicated. What could explain the conflicting

meanings they attached to their sense of belonging to this organization? Nonetheless, she agonized over her decision. Was it worth it to risk the officers' trust (she now viewed some of them as friends) by formally studying them and by discovering something they might not like? Was it too late for her to be objective?

After talking with her thesis director and the police department's administrators, Elizabeth decided to take that risk. She began to ride along with the officers during their shifts, watching, listening, and taking notes as they talked with citizens and with each other. She also started to document the conversations that occurred during her regular work shifts. In this process, some of the officers were welcoming; others were suspicious. Most of them expressed a desire that she understand how things "really" worked in their job: the organizational politics; the ever-present possibility of conflict and danger; the insult of being confused with "mere" security guards; and the gratification of "protecting and serving" those in genuine need.

Elizabeth took the further step of asking members of the police department to talk with her privately in extended, one-on-one conversations. In these exchanges (most of them audio recorded), she asked them to further discuss events that she had witnessed and statements that she had heard them and others make. In a final step, she collected a variety of documents (e-mail messages, memos, etc.) that suggested how administrators of the department wished the officers to see themselves, the organization they worked for, and their profession.

Where did this all lead? Elizabeth developed a growing hunch that the officers' level of satisfaction with working in the department was connected to their image of "real" policing as a professional ideal. That is, she recognized that the officers and their superiors were working to create an image for this organization that could survive insinuations by outsiders that it lacked authority and credibility (e.g., as a collection of "toy cops"). As a result, the officers sought constant reassurance from their superiors and peers that their accomplishments conformed to that ideal. Indeed, they cultivated an alternate positive image of the university and the department as valued sites of "good" police work. Gradually, Elizabeth drew on communication theories of "organizational identification" and "unobtrusive control" to explain these discoveries.

Elizabeth's project turned out to be successful. She defended her thesis and received high honors. After taking a bridge year to work as a manager for a large retail corporation, she decided to go on to graduate school, where she has continued to study organizational communication (most recently, in a community resource center serving transgender persons). She even married (but later divorced) the police officer she was dating. Looking back on it all, she says, "I think I always knew a significant story was waiting to be told."

This is a glimpse of a qualitative communication researcher at work. Elizabeth was actually learning the craft of a particular qualitative methodology known as "ethnography." Her story depicts how researchers develop questions, how they decide what to observe and report, and how they become personally implicated in this process. Elizabeth's story also offers some good news: While this research situation was at times challenging, it also became—with reflection, practice, and assistance—manageable.

What about the research methods chosen in this project? In this regard, Elizabeth's study is a veritable trifecta. First, she employed *participant observation*. As this term implies, researchers using this method become active and involved members of an existing group, adopting roles that other members recognize as appropriate and nonthreatening. By participating in a group's activities, researchers gain insight into the obligations, constraints, motivations, and emotions that its members experience as they complete their everyday activities. Effective participation is one prerequisite for making successful qualitative claims about communication. We'll explore this method further in Chapter 6.

In addition to observing others, Elizabeth conducted *interviews*. As we'll discuss further in Chapter 7, these interviews can go by several different names. Generally, they resemble conversations between equals who systematically explore topics of mutual interest. Most of what is said and meant in these conversations emerges through collaborative interaction. Although qualitative researchers often go into interviews with an agenda, they usually do not impose much structure on these conversations. For example, Elizabeth's questions encouraged the police officers to express their personal understanding of their work, rather than forcing them to choose responses from items on a predetermined list. Qualitative researchers interview people for several reasons. These can include seeking to understand their unique perspective on a scene; to recover their memories of an event; to gain their expert insight or information about a problem; to obtain descriptions of events that are normally unavailable for observation; to foster trust; to understand sensitive relationships between group members; and finally, to create a record of communication that can be analyzed later.

Finally, in completing her study, Elizabeth also collected and analyzed *documents* as well as other artifacts. This was because her study examined narratives (stories) about the organization developed by its members. Qualitative researchers performing this kind of analysis typically supplement their use of other methods by "reading" the "texts" of material culture (e.g., clothing, architecture, cars) as a primary means of symbolic expression. Visual media—such as photographs and video—can also be used by group members and researchers to document activities and events, and to capture

different perspectives on their significance. We will explore this method further in Chapter 8.

We focus in this volume on these three techniques because, when used together, they create a kind of flexibility that is necessary for successful qualitative research. This flexibility is important because qualitative research is fundamentally motivated by curiosity and often characterized by improvisation. As Elizabeth's project demonstrates, that curiosity is expressed in questions such as the following: *What is going on here? What is being accomplished? How do they do it? How does this activity change, depending on who is doing it, and when and where? How do they understand and justify the things they do with each other? Who are they—both to me and to themselves? Who am I to them?* And finally, *how can the answers to these questions serve communication scholars and professionals, as well as the general public?*

Performances and Practices. These questions embody a principal commitment of qualitative communication research: *to study human symbolic action in the various contexts of its performance*. Put another way, qualitative researchers are committed to studying *the performances* and *practices* of human communication.

To explain, let's break down these two terms. First, by *performance,* we mean communication whose qualities of *skill, expressiveness*, and *immediacy* compel us to view it as something more than mere "messages," or as a transparent vehicle of information. That is, performances are *creative*, *native* (i.e., innate to group culture), and *collaborative interaction events*—one example would be a specific incident of joke-telling conducted among friends. They reflect what we know intuitively to enact with others, and how.

"Practices," alternately, form the *generic and routine dimension* of communicative acts. In comparison to performances, practices are more abstract and standardized. They form the coherent category of action that is indexed (referred to) by the vivid—and sometimes chaotic—features of a particular performance. As a result, finally, practices provide *cultural labels* for social action. These labels represent relatively formal *concepts* developed by communicators (and researchers) for use in interpreting each other's motives in particular situations. They allow us to carve out a portion from interactional flux and make it meaningful. That is, I resort to invoking practices when I am trying to explain what I think you are doing, based on how you seem to be doing it. And you do the same with me. Our interaction often succeeds or fails based upon our ability to share these kinds of characterizations.

Let's illustrate with an example. The development of social media platforms such as Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram has contributed to the growth of

"vernacular visual culture." That is, regular people use these platforms to share digital images they have taken of events that are important for them. Many of these images reflect strategic efforts by the people depicted to arrange and present their bodies for the camera in a desirable manner—one that suggests a particular mood (party!) or creates a particular effect (ironic!). This development has given rise to a new cultural vocabulary that categorizes these images (e.g., the ubiquitous "selfie"). One example involves women striking a pose that will (allegedly) increase their appearance of physical attractiveness by reducing the visual prominence of unattractive features. In the words of one performer: "Get a group of 20-something women together and one (if not all) will pop their arms out. . . . The idea is that putting your hand on your hip . . . will make your arm look skinnier and your waist look smaller" (O'Neil, 2012, n.p.). The frequency and consistency of this performance has led some observers to label it "Chicken Wing" (edging out other candidates, including "the Sorority Girl . . . the Hand-on-Hip Pageant . . . and . . . the Sassy Arm Triangle of Insecurity"; Liebelt, 2014, n.p.). This labeling has enabled commentators to publicly discuss a number of related issues, such as the body images of younger and older women, the cultural history and disciplining effect of feminine beauty norms, and the migration of those norms between "old" media (e.g., the annual "red carpet walk" on the Academy Awards broadcast) and "new" media spheres.

Despite its growing status as a taken-for-granted default, however, we should not assume that merely labeling this practice can explain everything that is relevant about its performance. Instead, we need to remember that it always emerges in complex, local situations, where photographic subjects are experiencing unique requirements arising from the distinctive and unfolding interaction of people, motives, settings, and technologies. Amid these constraints, we are always making moment-to-moment decisions arising from the influence of our own—and others'—interests. As a result, a young woman about to be photographed most likely does not think, "I am now going to adopt the Chicken Wing pose." She may instead be more concerned as a bridesmaid with not blocking the bride. Or with making sure that she is positioned next to her best friend, who is preparing to travel abroad and who she will not see for a year. Or with disguising a stain on her dress resulting from an overenthusiastic toast. Or with striking a pose that matches the pose of others in the shot. In this way, the Chicken Wing is performed amid a stream of other related activities: "adjusting our hair, switching positions so we could get our 'good sides,' sucking in, checking the lighting, or asking someone to take a vertical shot" (O'Neil, 2012, n.p.).

We offer this example to illustrate how qualitative researchers are concerned with *the interaction between performances and practices*, which

constitute the texture of our everyday communication. Virtually any communicative act can be studied as a kind of performance, which can, in turn, be viewed as a variation on a practice (i.e., not all enactments of the Chicken Wing are identical). Indeed, qualitative researchers often explore how far a performance can vary from the model of a particular practice before it is taken by its audience as an example of a *different* kind or mode of practice (e.g., someone will likely develop a subversive *parody* of the Chicken Wing). Viewed in this light, the situated, practical, and relational construction of meaning is virtually indistinguishable from communication. That is, communication *constitutes* social reality as "a co-emerging act whereby our performances and practices are produced within, and participate in producing, cultural and political structures" (Farias & Chuang, 2014, p. 75).

In the next section of this chapter, we review the intellectual foundations of this assumption. More specifically, we compare and contrast four "paradigms" that have historically shaped the development of qualitative research in the discipline of Communication. After that review, we'll discuss two trends that are currently shaping the conduct of that research.

Rounding the (Paradigm) Bases: A Brief History of Qualitative Communication Research

Research methods are the "practical technologies" of intellectual traditions. That is, they provide concrete resources for strategic activities that *sustain* formal theories and philosophies by generating knowledge that supports their claims. Particularly relevant in this relationship are core, taken-for-granted beliefs displayed in those traditions about the nature of communication's reality (also known as *ontology*) and about how that reality may be known by researchers (*epistemology*). These beliefs are often displayed only implicitly in actual research studies, but they form an important code influencing how communication researchers present their work—and evaluate the work of others—as exemplars of a particular intellectual tradition. This assertion by researchers of a preferred frame for interpretation sets audience expectations about the form and content of that research. When these expectations are satisfied, audiences may judge that research to be credible. Researchers who ignore this condition use qualitative research methods at their peril. They usually experience frustration and produce confusing results.

We are describing here the relationship of communication researchers to *paradigms*. This term refers to fundamental models, or frames of reference, that we use to justify our choices in designing and conducting communication research. Because they are relatively more abstract, paradigms exist

above and behind particular theories and methodologies. They represent ways of understanding communication that are more general than any specific tradition. As a result, they help us to classify those traditions as metaphorical "families" whose members possess key similarities. Paradigms are so intrinsic to our ways of thinking and acting that they are often not fully recognized until they are challenged by some unexpected development, or by the advocates of an alternate belief system. This condition confirms the *social* as well as *intellectual* status of paradigms. As noted above, they include *normative sets of principles*. Communication researchers use these principles to prioritize which questions and problems should be investigated, and how. Paradigms establish limits on the kinds of work research communities view as worthy of investing their time, energy, and money in. Scholars who orient to the same paradigm see each other as collaborators in the normal progress of related research.

Positivism. How have paradigms affected the development of qualitative methods in communication research? We can begin to answer that question by turning to a vision of communication research expressed in 1975 by the famous media scholar James Carey:

> To seize upon the interpretations people place on existence and to systematize them so they are more readily available to us. This is a process of making large claims from small matters: studying particular rituals, poems, plays, conversations, songs, dances, theories, and myths and gingerly reaching out to the full relations within a culture or a total way of life. (p. 190)

At the time of its publication, Carey's vision opposed the domination of communication research by a paradigm known as *positivism*. Positivist assumptions had become influential during the postwar era, as social scientists imitated the premises and activities of research conducted by natural scientists (partly as a bid to gain equivalent professional prestige). In Freudian terms, positivism was the symbolic Father that qualitative research had to slay to stake its claim to authority and legitimacy. As a result, this tradition has been frequently caricatured—and sometimes demonized—sometimes under the related labels of objectivism, empiricism, and rationalism. At the center of this struggle lie the following positivist claims (Anderson, 1987, 1996):

- The *reality* of communication consists of its *actual*, *verifiable* nature, as opposed to our fleeting opinions or fantasies about it. That reality is a *singular*, a priori, and *objective* state of existence. It occurs *independently* of our efforts to know it.
- *True* knowledge of communication reality arises from our observation of *its empirical manifestations*—principally, people's verbal and nonverbal

behaviors. These manifestations form the tangible, material—and informative—traces of that reality.

- The concepts and methods of the *natural sciences* are—with some modification—a legitimate model for the conduct of communication research.
- The reality of communication is *essential* (i.e., it constitutes the core of communication's enduring, distinctive, and irreducible *being*). This condition constrains the range of claims that we can make about communication. As a result, our claims should seek to continuously approach—and ultimately correspond with—that essence. To do this, we should constantly refine our research methods to maximize their *rigor* (i.e., thoroughness and precision) and their *accuracy*.
- In defining and observing communication, we should *reduce* the complexity of its manifestations in order to *isolate* the existence of their specific elements and to *clarify* their underlying relationships.
- *The logic of measurement and quantification* (e.g., expressed in researchers' use of statistics) is best for depicting empirical observations of communication (e.g., as records of its amount, frequency, and rate).
- Researchers should look for, and explain, *the mechanisms of cause and effect* that determine human communication. They should uncover that unique mix of sufficient and necessary conditions that will *produce* a particular communication phenomenon.
- To establish cause and effect relationships, communication researchers should examine the relationship between *variables* (i.e., characteristic traits and performances that can assume different values, such as *low* or *high* communication anxiety). As a result, researchers should *aggregate* (i.e., artificially group together) research subjects (e.g., as population samples), based on their possession of a specific, desired trait or performance.
- Communication theory is best developed *deductively*. Researchers should proceed by proposing—and then testing—explanations for communication phenomena, based on existing, verified knowledge about them. *Hypotheses* (i.e., formal and falsifiable propositions about the relationship between variables) that are validated by careful and rigorous testing should be incorporated in theory.

In Communication, the historical impact of positivism emerged in a variety of forms. These included a commitment by researchers to establish external and psychological causes for communication behavior, a focus on predicting and controlling that behavior, and the use of quantitative methods to analyze data collected in artificial settings (e.g., experiments and surveys). There are many famous examples of research programs we could cite here; the study of media effects may be the most prominent and resilient.

While the influence of positivism on communication research has certainly been powerful, it has never been total or simple. One reason is that communication researchers were never unified about the appropriate goals and strategies for conducting positivist research. This was partly because positivism is itself a conglomeration of multiple and conflicting intellectual traditions (Corman, 2005). As a relatively young and interdisciplinary field, also, Communication tended toward pluralism and diversity in philosophical matters—even if this tendency was not consistent across its subfields. Finally, communication researchers responded in various ways to intellectual critiques of positivism mounted in the postwar era. These critiques emerged from innovations in both the natural and social sciences that challenged several of positivism's core assumptions. Points of contention here included positivism's conflation of the *discovery* of communication phenomena with the *verification* of their explanation; its presumption that "facts" could be generated independent of theory, values, or terminology; its imposition of artificial constraints on the goals and purposes of research; and ethical dilemmas arising from its commitment to researcher *detachment* (even, potentially, in the face of human evil and suffering).

Postpositivism. As a result of these critiques, many communication researchers affiliated with an emerging *postpositivist* paradigm. Postpositivists, explains Corman (2005, p. 21), "are people who value a scientific approach to explaining social phenomena, but who also accept many of the criticisms of the different positivisms, and have developed positions that transcend them." As a result, these researchers oriented their work to the following premises (Corman, 2005; Miller, 2002, pp. 32–45):

- The reality of communication spans *physical* and *social* realms. These realms are composed of complex phenomena that exist independently of individual perception. Human *beliefs* about these phenomena, however, are multiple, partial, and inexact.
- Communication occurs as humans interact in *patterned* (i.e., recurring and similar) ways. Our participation in these patterns reifies (i.e., stabilizes and perpetuates) our beliefs about communication phenomena, and infuses them with qualities of *predictability, significance*, and *consequence*.
- Our knowledge of communication is best developed by searching for causal explanations for (i.e., generative mechanisms of) its observed patterns. We should assume that these causes are *interactive* and *evolving*.
- *Absolute* truth and *completely value-free* inquiry may be unattainable in communication research. Nonetheless, the discovery of *falsifying instances* for hypotheses and the *reduction of bias* in research (e.g., through peer

review of reported findings) are both attainable and desirable. In this way, the "objectivity" of communication research is a product of *collective action* performed by a community of scholars—it is not the inherent property of an isolated, individual act.

- In designing, conducting and evaluating research, we should equally value the goals of *discovering* (i.e., conceptualizing) communication phenomena and *verifying* our explanations of them.
- In studying communication phenomena, researchers should document, preserve—and account for—the *emic* (i.e., ordinary, lived, and felt) experience of social actors (i.e., their authentic motives and interpretations).
- Communication research conducted in *natural settings* (e.g., the use of media by family members in their home) can usefully document contextual (i.e., situational) influences on social action.
- Both quantitative and qualitative methods are legitimate resources for conducting communication research.
- The use of multiple research methods can enhance our explanations of complex communication phenomena—for example, by "triangulating" (comparing and contrasting) findings from their use.
- Communication researchers should value qualitative methods for their contribution to structured (and potentially quantitative) analysis of collected data. The use of statistics by qualitative communication researchers, however, is more likely to be *basic* and *descriptive* (e.g., frequency counts), than complex and inferential (e.g., regression analysis).

Again, while examples abound, one notable site of postpositivist research is *health communication*, where the legacies of epidemiological science (which is concerned with the causes, spread, and prevention of illness) have shaped the relationship between traditional cognitive-behavioral approaches and an alternative qualitative approach (Zoller & Kline, 2008).

While this paradigm shift may create the impression that "there are no positivists anymore" (Corman, 2005, p. 31), there are at least three reasons to believe otherwise. The first is that this shift has not been universal. While some elements of positivist research have been challenged, others—such as a belief in value-free inquiry—persist in modified form as both general ideals and specific protocols. Second, the tradition of postpositivism manifests differently in specific regional, disciplinary, and institutional contexts. There may be no bigger tent in the academic world than Communication, which serves as a *field* (i.e., an intellectual home, a topical cross-roads, a professional meta-identity) for many different groups, with their various theoretical, methodological and practical interests. As one travels among academic institutions located within a single nation—to say nothing of internationally—one finds both similarity and variation in what

the locals define as important traditions of "communication research." As a result, it is best to consider postpositivism as a potential influence whose local manifestations are shaped as much by arbitrary group culture as by inherent intellectual validity.

Finally, in the aftermath of positivism, communication has become an increasingly specialized and fragmented discipline. Within and across its subfields, different traditions coexist in various states of tension and harmony (to be discussed further in Chapter 2). While a few communication scholars resent this pluralism ("Wouldn't things be simpler if we could just . . . ?"), many welcome it, and almost everyone accepts it as a political reality created by the discipline's increasingly widespread and explicit endorsement of progressive and radical ideologies (e.g., of diversity, social justice, and activism). That said, many communication researchers struggle to maintain a *lingua franca* for working with their colleagues. It seems that the best we can do in these circumstances is keep up with developments in our core fields of interest, while monitoring the interdisciplinary periphery for opportunities to innovate and collaborate. Put another way, communication researchers inhabit an archipelago: Your group has its "home" island and we have ours. When the winds and tides are favorable, we can visit and trade with each other.

Interpretivism. Capitalizing on positivism's compromised status, advocates for qualitative methods moved to engage their opponents in a passionate debate. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, a key group of scholars advocated for *interpretivism*—a paradigm that is also known as "naturalism," "hermeneutic empiricism," and "constructivism" (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). This paradigm developed from the convergence of several nineteenth- and twentieth-century intellectual traditions, including German idealist philosophy, phenomenology, hermeneutic philosophy, and American pragmatism. We'll explore these traditions further in Chapter 3, but for now we may consider the following as distinctive commitments of interpretivism:

- Because it is a fundamentally *human* and *social* practice, communication should not be studied according to the logics and methods of the *natural* sciences. Instead, researchers should use *qualitative methods* such as participant-observation and interviewing.
- Communication should be studied in the scenes of its *natural* occurrence (i.e., as opposed to contrived settings such as laboratory experiments). Qualitative researchers should go where the action is, and seek to become a part of it.
- The *realities* (note the plural here) of communication are *unique, simultaneous*, and *local* phenomena. In other words, reality is *prolific* and *emerges between* humans through their symbolic activities of expression and interpretation. Instead of trying to resolve the single, objective truth of communication reality,

interpretivists prefer to examine "social realities," which they believe develop as people collaborate in making sense of the communication they encounter, in deciding how to respond, and in performing that response (repeating as needed).

- Interpretivists believe that communication researchers should study how humans use *cultural symbol systems* (e.g., language) to create shared meanings for who they are and what they do. In this process, researchers should seek to achieve *deep, empathic understanding* of human actions, motives, and feelings. They should *preserve* the subjective experience of social actors by depicting their communication as something that is *distinctively meaningful for them*. This is known as the *emic* perspective.
- Interpretivist researchers prefer to develop theory *inductively*. Rather than engage in mechanical testing of hypotheses, and revision of *existing* concepts within established logics, they seek to develop *new* concepts or to revise existing concepts using unexpected and provocative perspectives.
- This process of building theory is also *iterative*. This means that qualitative communication researchers develop *tentative* explanations of the data they gather, and then compare those *initial* explanations with knowledge they gain from *further* interaction with group members. And then the cycle repeats. As initial explanations are increasingly confirmed, their value is considered "expansionistic," because they help us to better understand similar phenomena, both within and across particular sites of communication.
- We can never exist or work completely *separate* (e.g., objective) from the things that we study. We are always influenced at some level by basic beliefs about what those things may (or should) mean, that we carry with us as a result of our socialization concerning cultural categories such as race, class, gender, sexual identity, religion, partisan politics, military service, and ability status. Instead, researchers and the communication they study are *interdependent*. They are constantly influencing, implicating, and activating each other.
- Additionally, this socialization ensures that we can never have *total* or *final* understanding of the multiple realities existing in a scene of communication (could anyone?). Instead, our understanding is always *partial*: We instinctively gravitate toward noticing, validating, and emphasizing those realities that are familiar and comforting to us. As a result, we must work intentionally to engage with the realities of groups that are less familiar and comforting.
- These conditions of interdependence and partiality mean that qualitative communication researchers do not *use* methodological instruments (i.e., like tools in a toolkit). Instead, they *are* the instrument. This is because interpretivism requires us to observe and interpret both *our own* lived experience *and* the expressed experience of others.
- These conditions also mean that our claims of knowledge in qualitative communication research are *contingent*: They depend for their accuracy and success on managing our tendencies to prematurely explain or judge the groups we study.

- Interpretivists generate credible knowledge through *prolonged immersion* in actual social settings (e.g., motorcycle gangs; scrapbooking clubs), and through *extensive interaction* with the members of those groups. In this process, they achieve *intimate familiarity* with the local meanings and practices of group members (e.g., their rituals for initiating new members and for promoting experienced members).
- Interpretivists use *verbal* and *narrative* means to collect data and to present evidence for their claims. For example, they write down their observations of events, and they record and transcribe their conversations with the people they interview.

During the 1980s, communication scholars identified with the interpretive paradigm published several compelling experiments based on the use of qualitative methods. In this process, they looked outside the traditions of American communication science for fresh inspiration: to *sociology* for its symbolic-interactionist and phenomenological traditions; to *literary theory* and *psychoanalysis* for new ideas about texts and audiences; to *critical theory* for alternate explanations of power, agency, and social structure; and finally, to *cultural studies* for its innovative integration of theory and method in the study of everyday life. This stream of publications continued into the 1990s, breaching the remaining strongholds of quantitative research. Significantly, these arguments did *not* prove that positivist science and quantitative methods were somehow *faulty* modes of inquiry. Instead, they established that they were *incongruent* with the goals of studying situated and reflexive social action.

There were, however, at least three obstructions on this path. First, communication scholars had to rebuild the institutional curriculum of qualitative methods training, which had languished since the 1960s. Second, researchers battled lingering perceptions that qualitative methods produced *soft science*, characterized by imprecise instruments, biased observations, selective reporting of data, and ambiguous, limited findings. Third, qualitative researchers battled a related stigma associated with their selection of controversial topics. Because some researchers had followed "personal" interests in choosing questions and sites, their studies grated against existing standards of decorum and rigor in Communication scholarship. Also, because qualitative research sometimes depicts alternative and deviant subcultures, it has provoked mainstream audiences to dismiss such work as trivial, irrelevant—and even offensive.

During the 1990s, however, this opposition lost much of its edge and energy, largely due to the development of increasingly sophisticated rationales for—and exemplars of—qualitative research. Sentiment swung in the other direction. Graduate-level offerings of qualitative methods instruction

increased. Journal editors devoted precious volume space to the publication of qualitative studies, and professional associations founded sympathetic journals and special interest groups (e.g., the National Communication Association's Ethnography Division). University and commercial presses followed suit with dedicated book series. And finally, communication scholars were motivated to adopt qualitative methods during this period because their interdisciplinary colleagues, funding agencies, and professional clients became interested in exploring this kind of research.

Critique. This history would not be complete, however, without discussing the concurrent rise of a *critical* paradigm in qualitative communication research. The term *critical* invokes a rich and complex set of intellectual traditions. Generally, these traditions promote ethically and politically sensitive study of the relationships between power, knowledge, and discourse that are produced in situations of historical and cultural struggle. As a result, critical research engages topics such as "exploitation, repression, unfairness, asymmetrical power relations . . . distorted communication and false consciousness" (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996, p. 192). One example of a critical research question in communication might include the following: *How can U.S. protestors concerned with the unjust use of deadly force by police officers against Black citizens find common ground with officers who feel unfairly judged? What counts as "legitimate evidence" in this controversy? What counts as "reasonable procedure" for investigating competing claims made by these groups? Who gets to decide?*

"Critique" has ascended to the status of a paradigm due to the synergy among several related theories (discussed further in Chapter 3). While these theories have as many differences as they do similarities, the overlap and resonance in their commitments has led observers to declare the existence of a distinct, meta-theoretical genre (Kinchloe & McLaren, 2005; Schwandt, 2007). Those commitments include the following:

- Our understanding of communication phenomena is "always-already" mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constructed. That is, we are born into structures of power and knowledge (e.g., patriarchy and heteronormativity) that we did not choose, but which nonetheless shape our understanding of what is normal, possible, and legitimate about communication.
- Those power relations are developed in and through our communication with others, which creates identities (e.g., forms of self-consciousness) through which we are able to view—and act toward—ourselves, others, and the world as *meaningful* objects.

- The "facts" of theory and research can never be isolated from the values exerted by influential institutions (e.g., the agencies and foundations that fund communication research). These activities are not—and can never be—"innocent."
- While its influence is not total or final, *political economy* (i.e., the structures through which a society develops and allocates its resources) significantly shapes cultural meanings and communicative practices. This influence commonly divides actors into groups marked by unequal possession of—and control over—sources of power and status. These sources can be both material (e.g., manufacturing technology) and symbolic (e.g., refined taste). The identity structures associated with political economy (e.g., social class, occupation) interact with those produced by other institutions (e.g., religion, nation) to produce complex situations, in which mainstream communication is alternately accommodated, negotiated, and resisted by cultural members.
- Researchers should study (and challenge) the means by which *oppression* is created, reproduced, and transformed through communication. This term refers to conditions which passively or actively prevent individuals and groups from pursuing their social, economic, and political *interests* (i.e., freedom, security, and prosperity). Critical theory is particularly concerned here with the modern co-emergence of *capitalism* and *science/technology*. These forces have powerfully shaped human existence in liberal Western societies and have fueled their imposition of values such as consumerism and privatization on other developing societies.
- Researchers should consider how they may be *complicit* in reproducing oppressive conditions. For example, researchers studying social service agencies may unconsciously adopt the ambient professional value in those settings of "helping" clients. Depending on its local connotations, this value may encourage researchers to unintentionally patronize and control those clients, inhibiting their ability to make (and learn from) important life decisions. Instead, in this view, researchers should try to develop *authentic*, *collaborative,* and *accountable* relationships with the people they study. They should support marginalized groups in their humane pursuit of interests such as voice, dignity, justice, and autonomy. Critical research may contribute to the "emancipation" of these groups by providing them with new resources for thinking, feeling, and acting.

While the history of the critical paradigm in Communication is quite complex, we can note three points of intersection with qualitative methods. First, critical research traditions have been particularly strong in Communication's humanistic subfields (e.g., rhetoric). Qualitative research methods thus supplemented "the interpretive turn" as a medium through which those humanist scholars could develop a relationship with social science. Conversely, critical theory entered qualitative communication research

because it shared some interpretivist premises, for example, that social action could be viewed as a "text" amenable to both description and judgment.

Second, critical traditions have been cultivated in Communication subfields characterized by international membership (e.g., media studies) and by a predisposition to engage oppression (e.g., somewhat unexpectedly, organizational communication). Many members of these subfields were thus receptive to the influence of critical theories, and were prone to recognize the value of qualitative methods for advancing critical projects.

Finally, it's worth recalling a brief period of overt conflict during the 1980s and 1990s between critical theorists and qualitative researchers. The accusations in this conflict flowed two ways. Critical theorists claimed that ethnographers displayed naïveté in their "integrationist" depictions of cultural order, mistook cultural members' *consent* to dominant arrangements for their *endorsement*, and ignored the political complicity of a "neutral" research stance. Critical theorists thus feared that "detached" qualitative researchers could perpetuate oppression for no other reason than that they failed to conceptualize it (Putnam, Bantz, Deetz, Mumby, & Van Maanen, 1993). In turn, some qualitative researchers argued that extreme and rigid critical agendas were inappropriate for the conduct of qualitative research. These skeptics indicted critical theorists for deductively imposing their political agenda on the analysis of social action, for failing to prove that emancipation was itself an undistorted ideal, for oversimplifying the operations of power in actual cultural practice, and for failing to provide those they studied with viable solutions to documented problems.

This conflict was not intractable, however. Increasingly, qualitative communication researchers made use of sophisticated critical theories of identity, culture, and power to frame their studies. Critical theorists, in turn, adopted qualitative methods in growing numbers as a means of carefully describing everyday life.

Covering New Material(ism), Going Big: Two Trends in Qualitative Communication Research

Let's shift gears for a little bit. We have just reviewed the history and diversity of qualitative methods by examining different paradigms of communication research. One of our goals for this volume, however, is to identify *current* trends inside and outside academe that may affect your work (both now and in the near future). This shouldn't be a surprise: If there is anything that our history demonstrated, it is that qualitative communication research is a

sensitive creature that is constantly responding to changes in its environment. This discussion has become something of a tradition in this volume. In 2002 (the second edition), we discussed the revived diffusion of qualitative research methods among communication subfields, and the growing interest displayed in qualitative studies of (what was then called) *computer-mediated communication*. In 2011 (the third edition), we turned our attention to two other concerns: the *globalization* of Western-style communication (both as a cultural phenomenon and as a research topic) and the resurgence of positivist and "neoliberal" values in institutional fields such as health and education—specifically, the threats posed by related policies (e.g., of funding research) to the integrity of the qualitative enterprise. As we turn to current concerns, we offer two caveats. First, those previously discussed themes are still relevant, and so they will reappear throughout this volume. Second, our discussion here is more like a weather report than a photograph. It can only assess developing conditions, not confirm their final form. We don't pretend to know how they will play out, but we do believe you should be paying attention to them. In that sense, you will extend this discussion through the research you conduct.

Our first trend brings to mind a famous lyric from a song by the pop icon Madonna: *We are living in a material world*. This line is relevant here because communication scholars have recently been discussing the relationship between "material" and "discursive" dimensions of communication. By "material," they mean worldly forms and processes that appear to enjoy a prior, objective, natural, tangible, and embedded existence. We typically characterize material phenomena as being relatively *solid* (persistent in form), *independent* (not reliant for their being on human perception), *obdurate* (resistant to human will), and *determinate* (i.e., imposing an irresistible force on human activity). One example here would include genetics.

The term *discursive,* alternately, refers to a range of phenomena associated with the human development of symbol systems (principally, spoken and written language). These systems serve to express human cognition and intention, to establish common understanding, and to coordinate social behavior. However, because of its association with intangible, ideational phenomena (such as meaning), and its apparent limitations of *transience*, *arbitrariness*, and *inconsistency* (e.g., in influencing outcomes), "discourse" has typically been opposed and subordinated to materiality within Western metaphysics. In related logics, materiality is prioritized as an enduring realm of the Real that may be indicated—but not fully manifested—by mere derivative discourse.

Recently, longstanding academic conversations about the material and discursive status of communication have become more urgent (Aakhus et al.,

2011; Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009; Leonardi, Nardi, & Kallinilos, 2012; Lievrouw, 2014; Packer & Wiley, 2012). Across disciplinary subfields such as rhetoric, and organizational and environmental communication, we hear a common refrain:

- Our entrenched habits of theorizing communication reflect increasingly unsustainable commitments to the values of *idealism, disembodiment, humanism*, and *symbolism*.
- Communication has *always been material*. It must assume some physical form, and requires some kind of biological, mechanical, or electrical infrastructure for its production.
- Our human performance of speech and writing *depends upon, and coexists with*, the *agency* (i.e., the capacity to act and produce effects) of other *objects, bodies*, *species, places, technologies, environments*—and even *spirits*!
- This agency manifests as these entities *participate* in our communication through *organic, unpredictable*, and *influential* means. These means may include *sentience, expression, mediation*, and *collaboration*.
- We should no longer *suppress or minimize* the significance of this material effectiveness in our explanations of communication—for example, as if mere context for more important textuality.
- We should instead depict ongoing entanglements and articulations of materiality and discourse, which emerge among and between *the heterogeneous networks and economies* of actual communication.
- Communication subsequently appears as *a deeply contingent phenomenon* bristling with provocative qualities such as *relationality, temporality, assembly*, and *imbrication* (i.e., patterned overlap).
- Such communication may be a kind of construction, but not one that is singular, autonomous, or complete.

What are the implications of resurgent materialism for qualitative communication research? Two are immediately apparent. The first involves a tension between this development and intellectual traditions conceptualizing culture primarily as *a human system created to develop symbolic meanings*. The resonance of those traditions with the oralist study of speech and face-to-face communication has produced a powerful common sense about what communication *is*. As a result, we must reconsider—and perhaps redesign—our routines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data. Indeed, those changes reflexively penetrate fundamental assumptions in qualitative research about who (or what) is performing that research, and how. No longer, in this view, should we romanticize the individual researcher as if they were a principal "author" of events, nor should we automatically privilege their point of

view in research narratives (e.g., what if we studied communication on road trips from the car's perspective?). Instead, the researcher is merely one element in a holistic "assemblage" which coordinates the competing influences of theoretical frameworks, methodological traditions and technologies, visceral feelings, spatial and temporal contexts, and institutional policies (Fox & Alldred, 2014). Additionally, "new materialists" reject the assumption that qualitative analysis of data should necessarily produce clean and neat categories (e.g., of themes). Instead, it should more richly depict provocative (and sometimes disorienting) qualities of *multiplicity*, *ambiguity*, and even *incoherence* in communication (Pierre & Jackson, 2014).

The second implication of this trend here is more comforting. It recognizes a partial connection between materialist concerns and traditions of cultural research. Here, we recall that qualitative researchers have a long history of dealing with "cultural artifacts" outside of traditional discursive texts, such as tools, architecture, and music. While we cannot cover every possible category of these artifacts, we will discuss this diversity of qualitative data in Chapter 8.

Our second trend in qualitative research derives from the conventional wisdom that we are living in an era of rapid, widespread, and intensive change in information and communication technology (ICT). Frequent topics of discussion here include the conversion of "old" (i.e., analog, mass, and broadcast) media systems to "new" digital, peer-to-peer networks; the ascendant popularity of visual, multimedia culture over the ancient intimacy of face-to-face communication, and the modern logic of print; the "convergence" of communication tools and systems enabling cross-platform interaction with programs and data; the growth of portable, mobile, and "smart" (i.e., Internet-capable) devices that "dis-embed" the use of ICT from fixed times and places; and finally, the astonishing growth of social media systems (e.g., Facebook; LinkedIn; Twitter) enabling us to display customized profiles, to internally mail, chat, and text with members of our networks (i.e., followers), and to (re)produce (i.e., "post") media content outside traditional constraints. A key economic bargain that has been struck in this process involves the requirement by Internet companies that users of their products and services permit corporate access to, and ownership of, the personal data they generate. Generally, these corporations promise that these data will only be stored in the aggregate, with personal identifiers disguised or removed (i.e., as meta-data).

How is this development relevant to qualitative research? We can begin by recognizing that the business model of these companies depends on their routine surveillance of user behavior and their timely collection and analysis of related data (e.g., to anticipate market trends and pursue innovation). To this end, companies like Google and Twitter employ teams of social

scientists, both to sift ("scrape") their constantly growing archive of passively collected user data and to *actively* generate new data through strategic polling and interviews, and (most controversially) covert experiments that secretly alter the content of users' feeds and measure their response. For a variety of reasons, however, this development has begun to seep into the standards and practices of scholarly research. One factor here is the relative accessibility of this proprietary data—at least, for authorized researchers with inside contacts, legal contracts, or the funds to purchase datasets from commercial resellers. Importantly, system owners and resellers "clean" such datasets, imposing formats that may serve researcher needs (and that may also infuse systematic errors—the analogy here is eating someone else's leftover cooking, scraped from their dinner plate). Finally, we note the aura of currency (both temporal and financial) surrounding social media systems, which draws researchers to this exciting "real-world" setting of apparently spontaneous, continuous (and even authentic) communication. Together, these factors illustrate how technological innovations involve more than material infrastructure (Boyd & Crawford, 2012). They also involve ambiguous opportunities, professional norms, and cultural myths (perhaps even fetishes). Here, those influences have contributed to increasingly hegemonic assumptions concerning the role of Big Data in qualitative research.

What are the implications of those assumptions? First, we can note the persistent influence of positivism that shapes professional expressions of excitement and anxiety concerning *very large* sets of digital data (e.g., as of this writing, Facebook has over 1.7 billion monthly active users). Qualitative researchers have been quick here to note that "more is not necessarily better" and that the postpositivist ideal of generalizable sampling is not served unless the nature of data is already congruent with the goals and questions of a particular study (Marotzki, Holze, & Verstandig, 2013). That is, "big" is no guarantee of achieving rigor or elegance in our work, and Big Data may thus perpetuate outdated stereotypes concerning quantitative and qualitative research. Instead, we must summon the courage to ask whether a popular innovation is actually useful for qualitative needs—for example, will having more data help us to improve our concepts and theories? Indeed, decontextualized digital data can prove to be disappointingly "thin," brittle, and opaque—providing insufficient information about initial sampling, limited flexibility (i.e., no opportunity for ongoing dialogue with users), and scant evidence of the meaningful performances typically sought by qualitative researchers (Branthwaite & Patterson, 2011). It can also be quite difficult for researchers to verify identities and follow up with participants whose expressions remain anonymous. Finally, the ethical issues surrounding use of such data are complex, exacerbated by the lack of consensus among research

communities and their institutional regulators concerning standards for protecting participants.

All this does not mean, of course, that qualitative researchers should ignore opportunities to explore the enhanced, unobtrusive collection of digital data, or that they must know completely beforehand how such data will be used. It does mean that, if they choose to do so, they must develop the best possible rationales, as early as possible, and design the best possible systems for collecting and analyzing that data so that its rate, volume, and complexity do not contradict their paradigmatic assumptions or defeat their human limitations (i.e., some large datasets may generate economy of scale; others may generate rapidly diminishing returns). Additionally, it means that qualitative researchers will likely encounter Big Data in the context of large-scale, grant-funded projects involving interdisciplinary teams of researchers. In a recent, eye-opening forum, one organizational communication scholar described the often-frustrating (if not outright degrading) facework that interpretivist researchers must perform to influence the postpositivist researchers who typically lead those teams (Bisel, Barge, Dougherty, Lucas, & Tracy, 2014). For these reasons, qualitative communication researchers do well to approach claims and opportunities surrounding Big Data with a healthy degree of caution.

Conclusion

We've covered a lot of ground in this opening chapter. Let's summarize our discussion of concepts, histories, paradigms, and current trends in qualitative communication research. One key point is that, having won a historical battle for acceptance, *qualitative research methods* have continued to grow in influence within the Communication discipline. This trend has been fueled by ongoing developments, including the increased offering by programs of research methods courses to their undergraduate students (Bertelsen & Goodboy, 2009) and the appearance of numerous publications (including this one) seeking to standardize the conduct of qualitative communication research (Jensen, 2012). Despite some important exceptions and periodic relapses (discussed further in our next chapter), Communication has institutionalized *qualitative research* as a covering term for scholarship that values the *systematic study,* conducted in *natural settings,* of the *empirical features* and *lived experience* of *situated interaction* (Rawlins, 2012). More specifically, it values those elements as opportunities for researchers to practice *participation, reflection, description,* and *interpretation* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Potentially, our use of these methods makes the *ongoing accomplishment* and *meaningful interpretation* of social worlds more visible and discussable to their participants.

In qualitative research, we try to understand the communication of people who are actively engaged in trying to understand their own—and each other's—communication. We seek to develop useful stories about *their* stories, while accounting for the influence of our own values and beliefs on this process. Our activities of collecting and analyzing data come together as we develop increasingly precise and compelling language for explaining and critiquing human communication. Our research is successful if the people we study recognize in our work the felt significance of their struggles and their achievements.

Hopefully, you will find at least some of these features of qualitative research appealing. But we would be remiss if we did not offer a caution. It has to do with the "highly particular and hauntingly personal" nature of qualitative research (Van Maanen, in Berry, 2011, p. 166). Put simply, one legacy of positivist science involves the belief that researchers and their methodological tools are inherently separate—that those tools originate somewhere else, may be used at arm's length, and can be easily swapped out. This means that, when taking a course on qualitative methods, students may be influenced by a deep-seated expectation that someone else (e.g., the instructor or the textbook authors) will provide them with the "right" techniques and answers, enabling them to feel relatively safe and comfortable doing research (e.g., by reducing uncertainty about the outcomes of investigation).

For better and for worse, that is not always possible in qualitative research. Instead, conducting qualitative research requires us to develop a high tolerance for *interdependency*, *uncertainty*, and *improvisation*. Its epistemology and methodology are premised on our *not knowing*—completely, confidently, or in advance—how (or when) things will turn out. It requires us to risk our egos by attempting things, even before we know how to do them skillfully. It challenges us to tolerate *unfamiliarity, ambiguity*, and *vulnerability* surrounding the performance of communication—both our own and others'. It offers us the opportunity to develop *curiosity*, *compassion,* and *patience* in learning about ourselves—because others have offered us the opportunity to learn responsibly about them (and also *with* them). For this reason, some communication scholars have characterized qualitative research—only half-jokingly—as "a way of life." Our point is that, if you sometimes feel overwhelmed or discouraged in using these methods, you may want to reframe that initial reaction. That is, *those feelings may actually be a sign you are doing qualitative research the way it should be done*. If that is the case, we believe you should be acknowledged and encouraged. Over time, you may even come to accept those feelings as a welcome sign that a deep part of your mind is working on something important about your research. If you invite those feelings to speak, rather than push them away, they may offer you something

unexpected and helpful. The issue, in other words, is not that you have such feelings. It's what you choose to do with them.

Exercises

1. Search for a film or online video clip that depicts relatively plausible or unscripted communication between two or more people. Isolate a scene in this material that appears to depict the tension between performances and practices (e.g., two or more participants who share competing definitions of which practice should be invoked to interpret someone's performance). How does this exchange illustrate features of a performance that qualitative researchers should preserve in their conceptualization of a related practice?

2. This chapter compares and contrasts different paradigms that have shaped qualitative communication research. Think of a specific communication-related topic that you are interested in studying. To appreciate how choosing among different paradigms might influence you in this process, consider the three sets of questions in Box 1.1. Begin by answering each set of questions for your topic in the Positivism column. Then, choose at least one other column that represents a different paradigm that you are interested in. Now answer the questions for your topic again, from that perspective. Compare the answers you come up with in each column. What are the apparent advantages and disadvantages of using each perspective to study your topic?

Box 1.1 Diagnostic Questions for Distinguishing Communication Research Paradigms

	Positivism	Postpositivism	Interpretivism	Critical Theory
According to this perspective, what can I assume is *true* about this phenomenon? For example: 1. *Where* is it located? 2. *How* does it occur (what causes it)? 3. *What happens* as a result of its occurrence (what are its effects)?				

(Continued)

(Continued)

	Positivism	Postpositivism	Interpretivism	Critical Theory
According to this perspective, how should I *study* this phenomenon? For example: 1. *What* research methods should I use? 2. *How* should I use them? 3. *How would I know* if I was using these methods correctly?				
According to this perspective, what *values* (if any) should I consider in studying this phenomenon? For example: 1. *Whose* interests should I take into account? 2. What *ethical conflicts* might arise?				

3. Imagine that a neomaterialist researcher is studying the communication in your research methods class. In addition to "normal" verbal interaction between the members of the class, what other material conditions or artifacts might they study? For example, how do different *objects, bodies, species, technologies,* and *environments* all participate in this communication? How might that communication appear differently if it was depicted from a nonhuman point of view?

2

The Diversity of Qualitative Research in Communication Subfields

We know that some of the discussion in the previous chapter was pretty abstract. So in this chapter, we hope to make things more concrete. Specifically, we're going to encourage you to view yourself as an *active, relevant,* and *valuable participant* in the ongoing *conversations* that animate the Communication discipline. Although it's often hard to tell from the typically dense and formal prose of published research, those studies are actually conducted by human beings (just like you, they have hopes and dreams), who are trying to hold up their end of belonging to a scholarly community. They do this partly by reading, teaching, and responding to each other's work, thus extending and revising existing conversations about important topics and issues. Both now and in the future, your research may contribute to this process.

But all this can seem mysterious if you're just starting out as a communication scholar. During our initial orientation in communication programs, we learn that courses in the curriculum reflect distinctions made in the past by other people, and that carved up the big beast of communication into distinct, manageable parts (and there is ongoing debate about which cuts are the most choice). And there are lots of parts: Sometimes it seems like the term *communication* has an empty slot in front of it, calling out to be filled by an endless series of modifiers designating the emergence of still-more areas of study (e.g., perhaps, someday, *extraterrestrial* communication).

The teaching staff in your current degree program selectively represent these areas (and it's always interesting to learn about why some areas were included and others excluded). Gradually, we realize we have choices about which of these smaller areas to identify with (e.g., as tracks or streams in the Communication major). What we're less aware of, however, is that behind these abstract areas there are real groups and networks we can *actually join*. It also takes a while to discern how those groups have adopted and adapted general traditions of studying communication to create their specific subfield agendas.

So, what's a subfield? In Chapter 1, we mentioned that some observers view Communication in soft focus as a field. In this view, communication is a meeting place, where people from diverse backgrounds can converge and collaborate. In truth, that inclusive, outward-looking view exists in tension with the more exclusive, inner-directed reality of Communication as a *discipline*. In this alternate view, Communication is capitalized to signal its special status as a professional academic community that maintains a sovereign claim to distinctive knowledge, traditions, and agendas that set it apart from other disciplines such as Sociology or Linguistics. These assumptions fuel the day-to-day to work of communication scholars as they pursue their interests in the challenging environments of contemporary colleges and universities, where they compete with other groups for precious resources (e.g., students, faculty lines, operating budgets, prestige). When it is viewed as a discipline, discussions about Communication's boundaries and identities become sharper and more pragmatic. There is less tolerance for ambiguous or ambivalent membership and a greater privileging of demonstrated authenticity and loyalty.

As noted above, the diversity of groups and projects formally recognized within the Communication discipline (primarily through their authorization by professional associations) is wide—and getting wider. We use the term *subfields,* then, to describe *specific groups of communication scholars who immediately identify with colleagues who share their preference for studying a particular communication context, genre, or problem*. In this process, the members of these groups configure distinctive clusters of paradigms, theories, and methodologies to form their local version of "our" history and identity. Obviously, we're concerned here with how these groups have acted toward qualitative research methods.

Why should you care? For several reasons, it is useful for novice communication researchers to learn about these groups. Senior communication scholars, for example, socialize their students and younger colleagues to affiliate with them as a requirement for professional development. Beneath the discipline's institutional discourse, in which it speaks to itself as a large,

generic body, subfields are where the real career action is. This is partly because their smaller membership permits greater individual visibility, and also more intimate, manageable group activity, characterized by less ambiguous outcomes. Communication scholars, for example, typically evaluate each other's work based on evidence it "significantly impacts" a particular subfield agenda. As well, many communication scholars configure their identities and activities around *simultaneous* membership in *multiple* subfields—although one is usually most important. It's important to understand why some of these hybrids are more logical and successful than others. Paradigm shifts, further, play out differently within subfields as local matters of concern and debate. And finally, the identity of some subfields exists in a complex gravitational state, characterized both by "inward" membership in the Communication discipline and "outward" membership in larger international and interdisciplinary fields. In this way, mapping the Communication discipline is like looking through a kaleidoscope. As we shift our perspective across subfields, the image we see changes to form something that is both partly new and partly familiar. The more you grasp these distinctions, the better you should be able to enter and contribute to the conversations that constitute a particular subfield. As one of Bryan's colleagues says about this dominant logic of scholarly identity, "You are who you argue with."

Bearing this in mind, we turn now to discuss the manifestations of qualitative research methods in thirteen different subfields. This (alphabetically arranged) list of subfields could be much longer: We have selected here those that have traditionally (or recently) engaged in explicit discussion about their relationship with qualitative methods. Our hope is that somewhere in here is an image of your current or future "tribe."

Baker's Dozen: Thirteen Subfields, Thirteen Stories of Qualitative Communication Research

Applied Communication

Our first subfield includes focused projects undertaken by researchers for at least two purposes. The first is to assist individuals and groups in identifying and resolving practical problems that affect their ability to achieve their communication goals. Here, applied researchers "name, explain, and make improvements in how clients, listen, interact, read, write, and mediate messages" (Goodall, 2004, p. 186). The term *client* is distinctive here. Prior to 1990, most of these researchers were involved with corporate consulting, but

they have since expanded their focus to serve nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations, and community coalitions (Frey & SunWolf, 2009). Second, applied researchers view these naturally occurring settings as rich opportunities to build and test communication theory. Their studies often combine quantitative and qualitative methods to meet situational needs. They are characterized by collaboration between researchers and clients intended to successfully define problems, set goals, identify contributing factors, formulate strategies, and implement solutions. *Success* here includes participants feeling the research occurs sufficiently on their terms.

Qualitative methods are especially helpful for cultivating the ethical and political dimensions of these projects. Denzin and Lincoln (2000), for example, note that applied qualitative research

> 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 and clinically-oriented qualitative researchers can also create spaces for those who are studied (the other) to speak. (p. 23)

As a result, applied communication researchers are motivated to adapt and innovate qualitative methods that empower underserved groups to better understand and pursue their interests. One recent example, called *photo-voice* (Borron, 2013), involves giving cameras to participants to document their relevant experiences and activities. These images provide information that might not be articulated in verbal interviews. They also allow researchers and participants to collaborate in their interpretation of those images, enhancing rapport and developing unexpected insights. Another example involves integrating *group facilitation* practices with traditional ethnographic methods to enhance the accuracy and success of researcher understanding, intervention, and representation of findings (Hartwig, 2014).

The postpositivist tradition of applied communication research has been affected by recent paradigm shifts in the discipline. One recent review of related ethnography, for example, indicates that it serves a mix of pragmatic, theoretical, and ideological/political goals, and that qualitative researchers should acknowledge the "messiness, imperfections, and mistakes" (Ellingson, 2009b, p. 146) that suffuse their projects. Innovation by feminist researchers has been especially important here, including calls to represent the authentic "irrationalities" of embodiment, emotion, and contradiction in applied settings (Ashcraft & Trethewey, 2004), and the pursuit of relatively intimate concerns that expand the field's conception of normal

topics (e.g., grief and bulimia; Tillman, 2009). Other innovators (Goodall, 2008) have advocated for the use of narrative ethnography to tell "better" (i.e., more useful and memorable) *stories* about the relationship between communication theory and practice—hopefully bridging the gulf between professional scholars and popular audiences. Still others, finally, discuss the "translational" role played by applied scholars as they adapt existing research to serve clients' specific needs (Frey & SunWolf, 2009). Numerous exemplars may be found in issues of the eponymous *Journal of Applied Communication Research*.

Communication Activism

Our discussion of this subfield is conveniently placed, because it has partly evolved from applied communication. You'll recall we said that subfield had been affected by popularization of the critical paradigm. One outcome of that development was intensified discussion concerning whether and how communication scholars should act to serve the goals of social justice (Frey, Pearce, Pollock, Artz, & Murphy, 1996). Participants in those discussions considered various images of "communication advocacy," "community engagement," and "public scholarship" in their quest to develop a covering term for communication research characterized by an ethic of care, opposition to institutional oppression, and identification with marginalized groups. Perhaps inevitably, these discussions explored the boundary between *progressive* scholarship devoted to the relatively cautious path of incremental and internal reform, and a more robust, unabashed *radicalism* concerned with protest and externally imposed change (Dempsey et al., 2011).

This distinction can be controversial. As is well known, the affiliation of scholars with the critical paradigm during the 1990s sparked an enduring backlash among political conservatives, who have condemned the apparent contamination of objective curriculum with subversive ideas. Slightly less well known is the keen ambivalence felt among some scholars and administrators concerning the appropriateness of academics engaging in political activism as a professional practice—let alone calling it research (Fish, 2008). Motivations here include institutional timidity (e.g., fear of donor backlash), a preference for clear professional boundaries, and a defense of inductive epistemology against premature judgment and moralizing.

For various reasons, the Communication discipline (at least in North America) is increasingly receptive to this project. The relative tolerance displayed among related researchers for a range of progressive and radical commitments is no doubt a factor. This research, in other words, need not fit only one profile. Another factor is the genuine enthusiasm and fulfillment

experienced by participants in serving and improving (however precariously) the lives of others. For students and faculty increasingly frustrated with neoliberal politics (e.g., in which market-based rationalities demonstrably exacerbate inequality), such work can be invigorating, and realizes a suppressed potential for academic virtue. Accordingly, the National Communication Association has recently approved an Activism and Social Justice interest group, whose agenda parallels a longstanding interest elsewhere in the field in media activism and reform (Lee, 2012). Related projects are underway among groups promoting causes such as peace, prison reform, economic opportunity, labor rights, environmentalism, interethnic relations, and bridging the digital divide (deTurk, 2011; Löblich, 2015).

The intersection with qualitative methods here emerges as scholars are encouraged to avoid traditional objectification of activist groups and to instead liberate their full capacity for experiencing and participating in these groups as an expression of local citizenship (Frey & Carragee, 2007). The successful blending of related roles is not automatic, however, and qualitative researchers aspiring to "participant activism" (Rodino-Colcino, 2012) may find themselves engaged in continuous reflection and adaptation of their strategies.

Communication Media and Technology Studies

Officially, this subfield does not exist—or at least, not quite yet. Instead, it represents our heuristic punctuation of a "great landscape of study" (Anderson, 2011, p. 11), whose different features are claimed by various communities of scholars. Some of these groups are strongly identified with the discipline of Communication, others less so, and some barely at all. Metaphorically, our punctuation suggests a *binary star system*, composed of two bodies orbiting a shared center of gravity. Currently, this orbit is rapidly decaying, and these two bodies are spiraling toward stellar collision. This metaphor refers, of course, to the ongoing transformation of *media and technology systems* that is creating "superconnected" human communication (Chayko, 2016).

As the first of these bodies, the field of *media studies* was originally known as *mass communication*. This name change came about as its researchers shifted from studying the structures, functions, and effects of the press and broadcast media (e.g., their undesirable shaping of human development and public opinion; Altheide & Schneider, 2013) to conduct ethnographies of media audiences. This shift toward *reception studies* resulted from two developments: recognition by European critical theorists of the limits of purely textual and political-economic analysis, and dissatisfaction among many U.S. scholars with positivist research traditions.

Each group forged its own path toward embracing qualitative research: critical theorists through the development of cultural studies influenced by semiotic and poststructuralist theories, and U.S. mass communication researchers through their appropriation of social phenomenology (discussed further in Chapter 3).

Beginning in the 1980s, the rapid development of audience studies produced important insights into the social uses of media and emphasized the active interpretation by cultural members of mainstream media texts (e.g., Anderson & Meyer, 1988). It also created significant controversy. The critical turn, for example, produced a rift between empirical researchers who conducted fieldwork and office-bound scholars who preferred to politicize the textuality of published ethnography (Murphy, 1999b). Key, in any case, was the naturalistic move by qualitative researchers to study reception practices in the context of audience members' daily activities. Some researchers conducted *resistance studies* of subcultures whose members creatively deconstructed media texts to serve their unique interests and who appeared to subvert cultural hegemony by promoting alternate imaginaries (Fiske, 1991; Jenkins, 1992). Other media scholars used qualitative methods to challenge ethnocentric assumptions in media campaigns related to international aid and development. Still others focused on *interpretive communities*, in which media use is considered a ritual performance through which members establish and maintain a particular status with other group members (e.g., as the local pub's unimpeachable expert on this season's prospects for the home team). The rise of resistance studies and textual critique in this subfield produced, in turn, a backlash among scholars of political economy who rejected populist celebration of audience opposition as—at best—premature. They also called for a return to studying audiences as the material objects of institutional power (Morley, 1997). This agenda was further served by a companion program of qualitative research exploring the creation of media content in organizational settings, such as digital newsrooms and television program production.

The second orbiting body in this metaphor is *information and communication technology* (ICT). This term is itself somewhat arbitrary: We use it here to gather related programs of research in computer-mediated communication (CMC), Internet, web, digital, and new media (Baym, 2015). Compared to the identification of media studies with mass/broadcast media, researchers in this subfield originally oriented to the scientific, engineering, corporate, and state-regulatory features of computing and telecommunications technology. We have already discussed the implications of contemporary media convergence for the historical distinctions between these infrastructures and their related scholarly communities.

But what are the distinctive features of the resulting field of study? One is that its membership is highly interdisciplinary, containing not only the usual cast of communication scholars, but also computer scientists and engineers whose research questions have led them to social and cultural theory as a fresh source of answers for their questions about designers' and users' interaction with technology. Another characteristic is the wide range of research topics, whose categories include *artifacts* (e.g., personal fitness trackers and self-driving cars), *programs* (e.g., rideshare/taxi apps such as Uber and Lyft), *infrastructures* (e.g., server farms), *platforms* (e.g., augmented reality), *user group categories* (e.g., hackers and trolls), *activity genres* (e.g., catfishing, fantasy sports gambling), *regulatory regimes* (e.g., the Internet Engineering Task Force), and *affective zeitgeists* (e.g., "Fakebook"). While these phenomena are historically recent, the questions they pose for researchers are not entirely unfamiliar: *How do humans utilize technology to symbolically perform their identities, relationships, and communities? How do they adapt their existing meanings and practices to engage the affordances of new media (i.e., opportunities and constraints created through technological design and manufacture)*?

Here, communication scholars have moved from a narrow concern with facilitating effective adoption of new technologies to more broadly interpreting and critiquing that process (Nocera, 2002). As a result, they have made valuable contributions by challenging industry hyperbole and popular misconception by informing government regulation and by refining theory. Each of these gains, however, has necessitated the adaptation of traditional qualitative methodology to accommodate the increased speed of technology development cycles, the staggering scope of technological diffusion, the complexity of theory, and the problem of incomplete and unreliable data sources (Garcia, Standlee, Bechkoff, & Cui, 2009; Markham & Baym, 2009). How, for example, should ethnography be adapted to study interpersonal communication and emotional expression online (Beneito-Montagut, 2011)? In the face of ephemeral and volatile conditions, at least one scholar (Karpf, 2012) has advocated for the value of transparency (i.e., elaborate accountability concerning the limitation of datasets) and "kludginess" (useful, even if inelegant, improvisation) in research methods.

Unsurprisingly, published studies of *social media systems* and their usage have recently increased, particularly in the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* and *New Media & Society* (Khang, Ki, & Ye, 2012). "Social information processing" and "uses and gratification" have proven the most popular theoretical traditions, although the use of *quantitative* methods predominates (at a rate of around 60 percent). Similar trends obtain in the study of *mobile communication*—with an explicit plea from some researchers for

methodological innovation to overcome the limitations of convenience and single-country sampling (Taipale & Fortunati, 2014). These data points are informative, but not predictive. This field is young and subject to rapid pivot. Interpretive and critical methodologies such as "netnography" (Kozinets, 2010), "global technography" (Kien, 2009), and "computer-assisted qualitative data analysis" (CAQDAS) continue to draw intense interest, both inside and outside the communication discipline. This trend is partly spurred by the tendency of qualitative researchers who start out studying offline group behavior to embrace the benefits (and necessity) of following members online (Hallett & Barber, 2013). In this way, because the use of new media is increasingly integrated into the practices of everyday life (and its qualitative study), we will discuss related methodological issues throughout this volume.

Group Communication

During the mid-1990s, innovators argued that interpretivism could stimulate this apparently stagnant field of research (Frey, 1994a). Traditionally, group communication researchers had used quantitative methods to study zero-history groups of college students in one-time, laboratory events involving their solution of artificial, assigned tasks. Alternately, these innovators argued, qualitative methods could be used to expand the types of groups studied, the types of communication studied, and the types of evidence used to support research claims. Qualitative methods could also validate and extend existing group communication theory, generate new theory, recover neglected topics, and problematize conventional wisdom (Dollar & Merrigan, 2002).

This innovation would not be simple or automatic, however (Frey, 1994b). Using qualitative methods creates challenges for group researchers, including the need to negotiate agreements with members concerning access, inclusion, confidentiality, and mutually beneficial exchanges. Additional trends in this subfield include leveraging qualitative methods to study group members' increasingly global and mediated communication practices and to refine our understanding of the role played by context in shaping those practices (Frey, 2002). A recent exemplar here includes the use of nonparticipant-observation to study the communicative management of dialectical tensions among the members of Black female friendship groups (Goins, 2011).

Health Communication

This subfield represents a distinctive genre of applied research that was founded by postpositivist scholars of interpersonal and mass communication.

It has traditionally displayed a functionalist concern with assisting health care professionals in identifying and overcoming perceived communication problems that affect public health and the delivery of related care services. These problems can be interpersonal, organizational, and media or technology related. Predominantly, health researchers have used quantitative methods (most notably, the "gold standard" of the randomized clinical trial experiment; Kreps, 2011, p. 285) in projects seeking to predict and influence patient compliance with treatment programs, and to design and assess persuasive campaigns that shape larger societal attitudes and behaviors (Freimuth, Massett, & Meltzer, 2006).

Critics have noted, however, that such studies can reproduce the hierarchical authority of medical professionals over patients and distort needed understanding of their experiences. Use of qualitative methods has thus encouraged researchers to prioritize the integrity of patient subjectivity and agency in medical encounters (du Pré & Crandall, 2011). This approach recovers the situated, collaborated performances that actually underlie researchers' normalized conception and measurement of variables such as self-efficacy. It also emphasizes the role of cultural identities (e.g., gender, class, and racial) in the co-construction of profound—and often conflicting—meanings for the embodied conditions of illness, suffering, and death. Here, researchers have used qualitative methods such as interviewing, observation, textual analysis, autoethnography—and even creative performance (Rossiter & Godderis, 2011)—to accomplish desired goals. These include validating self-report data otherwise collected from surveys, foregrounding the voices of patients and professionals whose relationships constitute the social life of medicine (Kreps, 2008), exploring complex collaboration conducted within and between teams of care providers (Ellingson, 2003), and fostering reflection on suppressed cultural histories that affect the resiliency of public health. Additionally, these methods are useful in capturing the often ironic and poignant "ground truth" behind controversial, large-scale change programs conducted in health care institutions.

As in most other subfields, health communication has been significantly affected by recent paradigm change. Several trends have converged to influence the mainstreaming of interpretivist and critical approaches among these researchers—including growing interest among funding agencies in leveraging their benefits to enhance conceptual development and explanatory power (Britten, 2011; Kreps, 2011; Zoller & Kline, 2008). As a result, their research has become more interdisciplinary and international in its focus, more open to conducting participatory and collaborative studies, more likely to employ multiple methods (e.g., observation, shadowing, and focus groups; Manojlovich et al., 2015), and more ethically and politically sophisticated