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Choosing Among Five Approaches

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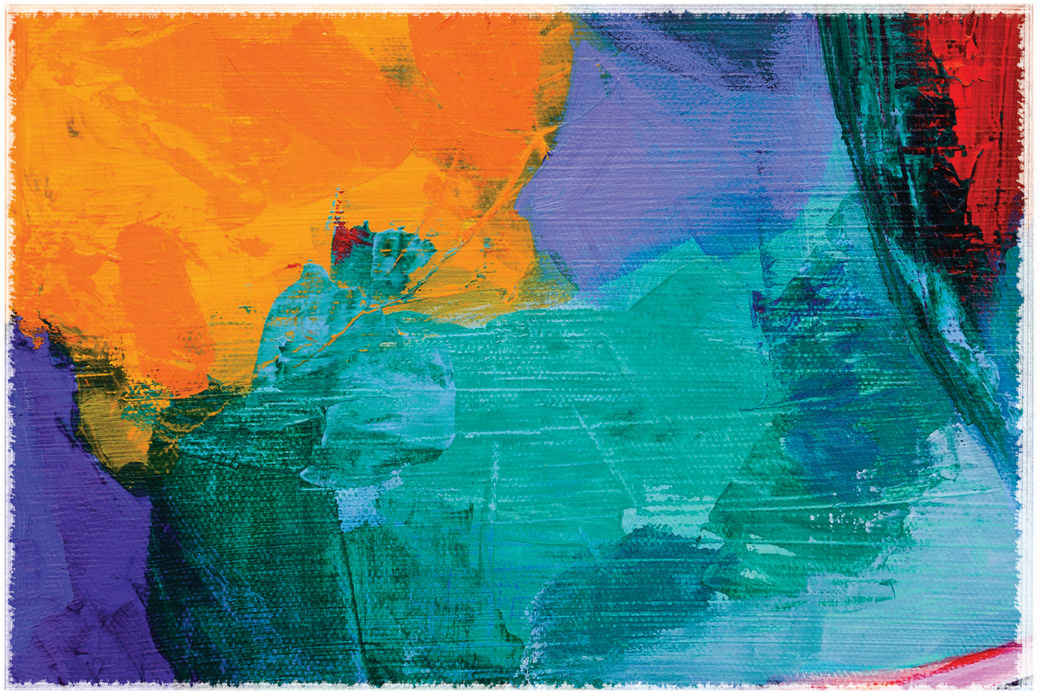

John W. Creswell | Cheryl N. Poth

FOURTH EDITION

Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design

John dedicates this book to Uncle Jim (James W. Marshall, MD, 1915–1997), who provided love, support, and inspiration.

Cheryl dedicates this book to her dad (Richard F. Poth, MBA, 1944–2016), who instilled confidence for trying new things, lessons for guiding life choices, and encouragement for pursuing bold dreams.

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John W. Creswell
University of Michigan

Cheryl N. Poth
University of Alberta

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• Brief Contents •

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• About the Authors •

John W. Creswell, PhD, is an adjunct professor of family medicine at the University of Michigan. He has authored numerous articles and 26 books (including new editions) on mixed methods research, qualitative research, and research design. While at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, he held the Clifton Endowed Professor Chair; served as director of a mixed methods center; founded the SAGE journal, the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*; and was an adjunct professor of family medicine at the University of Michigan and a consultant to the Veterans Administration health services research center, Ann Arbor, Michigan. He was a Senior Fulbright Scholar to South Africa in 2008 and to Thailand in 2012. In 2011, he led a national working group that advanced mixed methods practices in the health sciences at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). He also served as a visiting professor at the Harvard School of Public Health in 2013 and received an honorary doctorate from the University of Pretoria, South Africa in 2014. In 2014, he became the first president of the Mixed Methods International Research Association (MMIRA). In 2015, he assumed the role of the co-director of the Michigan Mixed Methods Research and Scholarship Program at the University of Michigan. He currently serves as a consultant and co-investigator on several national projects.

Cheryl N. Poth, PhD, has been a faculty member of the Centre for Research and Applied Measurement and Evaluation within the Department of Educational Psychology in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta since 2008. In this role, she has developed and taught graduate-level research methods and program evaluation courses in addition to supervising and mentoring students, faculty, and community members in qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research. Dr. Poth has an adjunct appointment in the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry and serves as the methodologist on several cross-disciplinary research teams. She has been principal investigator for projects and grants funded federally (e.g., Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and Physiotherapy Foundation of Canada), provincially (e.g., Alberta Education and Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research and Alberta Advisory Committee for Educational Studies), and locally (e.g., University of Alberta and School Boards). She has authored over 30 peer reviewed journal articles and served as guest co-editor of two special issues of the *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. In 2016, she was elected as the fourth president of the Mixed Methods International Research Association. (MMIRA). In addition to more than 100 conference and 25 workshop presentations, she served as co-chair of the 2013

Advances in Qualitative Methods (AQM) Conference. She has led research methods workshops with diverse audiences—for example, at the International Institute of Qualitative Methods' Thinking Qualitatively Series. She is a current associate editor of the Journal of Mixed Methods Research and editorial board member of the International Journal of Qualitative Inquiry.

• Acknowledgments •

John is most thankful to the many students in his qualitative research methods classes at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln who helped to shape this book over the years. They offered suggestions, provided examples, and discussed the material in this book. Also, he benefited from capable scholars who helped to shape and form this book in the first edition: Paul Turner, Ken Robson, Dana Miller, Diane Gillespie, Gregory Schraw, Sharon Hudson, Karen Eifler, Neilida Aguilar, and Harry Wolcott. Ben Crabtree and Rich Hofmann helped form the first edition text significantly and encouraged him to proceed, and they diligently and timely responded to the SAGE request to be first edition external reviewers. In addition, Keith Pezzoli, Kathy O'Byrne, Joanne Cooper, and Phyllis Langton served as first edition reviewers for SAGE and added insight into content and structure that he could not see because of his closeness to the material.

To the reviewers for this fourth edition, we appreciate your time and effort reviewing the draft of our book. As always, John is indebted to C. Deborah Laughton, who served as his acquisition editor for the first edition; to Lisa Cuevas Shaw, who served as editor for the second edition; to Vicki Knight, who served as editor for the third edition and who lined up Helen Salmon as acquisition editor for this fourth edition. Also for all of the previous editions, members of the Office of Qualitative and Mixed Methods Research (OQMMR) all provided valuable input. John especially singles out Dr. Vicki Plano Clark and Dr. Ron Shope, who have been instrumental in refining and shaping his ideas about qualitative research through the editions.

Cheryl is grateful to John and also Vicki Knight for presenting the opportunity to contribute to the current edition. John has been an influential mentor for her thinking and writing about qualitative research. She has especially appreciated John's willingness to consider new content ideas and ways of presenting material. Also, we are both grateful to our Department of Educational Psychology, University of Alberta and the Department of Family Medicine, University of Michigan, and colleagues.

Finally, to members of our families (for John—Karen, David, Kasey, Johanna, and Bonny; for Cheryl—Damian, Avery, and Jasper), thanks for providing us with time to spend long hours writing and revising this book. Thank you all.

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Introduction

The work on this book began during a 1994 summer qualitative seminar in Vail, Colorado, sponsored by the University of Denver under the able guidance of Edith King of the College of Education. At that seminar, while discussing qualitative data analysis, John began on a personal note, introducing one of his recently completed qualitative studies—a case study of a campus response to a student gun incident (Asmussen & Creswell, 1995). John knew this case might provoke some discussion and present some complex analysis issues. It involved a Midwestern university's reaction to a gunman who entered an actuarial science undergraduate class with a semiautomatic rifle and attempted to fire on students in his class. The rifle jammed and did not discharge, and the gunman fled and was captured a few miles away. Standing before the group, John chronicled the events of the case, the themes, and the lessons we learned about a university reaction to a near tragic event. Then, unplanned, Harry Wolcott of the University of Oregon, another resource person for this seminar, raised his hand and asked for the podium. He explained how *he* would approach the study as a cultural anthropologist. To John's surprise, Harry had "turned" his case study into ethnography, framing the study in an entirely new way. After Harry had concluded, Les Goodchild, then of Denver University, discussed how he would examine the gunman case from a historical perspective. Together the three had, then, multiple renderings of the incident, surprising "turns" of the initial case study using different qualitative approaches. It was this event that sparked an idea that John had long harbored—that the design of a qualitative study related to the specific *approach* taken to

qualitative research (see the glossary in Appendix A for definitions of bold italics terms). John began to write the first edition of this book, guided by a single, compelling question: How does the type or approach of qualitative inquiry shape the design or procedures of a study?

Purpose and Rationale for the Book

This book is now in its fourth edition, and we are still formulating an answer to this question. For this new edition, John sought to include another perspective to the conversation. Our primary intent in this book is to examine five different approaches to qualitative inquiry—narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies—and put them side by side so that we can see their differences. These differences can be most vividly displayed by exploring their use throughout the process of research, including the introduction to a study through its purpose and research questions, data collection, data analysis, report writing, and standards of validation and evaluation. For example, by studying qualitative articles in journals, we can see that research questions framed from grounded theory look different than questions framed from a phenomenological study.

This combination of the different approaches and how their distinctiveness plays out in the process of research is what distinguishes this book from others on qualitative research that you may have read. Most qualitative researchers focus on only one approach—say ethnography or grounded theory—and try to convince their readers of the value of that approach. This makes sense in our highly specialized world of academia. However, students and beginning qualitative researchers need choices that fit their research problems and that suit their own interests in conducting research. Hopefully, this book opens up the expanse of qualitative research and invites readers to examine multiple ways of engaging in the process of research. It provides qualitative researchers with options for conducting qualitative inquiry and helps them with decisions about what approach is best to use in studying their research problems. With so many books on qualitative research in general and on the various approaches of inquiry, qualitative research students are often at a loss for understanding what options (i.e., approaches) exist and how one makes an informed choice of an option for research.

By reading this book, we hope that you will gain a better understanding of the steps in the process of research, learn five qualitative approaches to inquiry, and understand the differences and similarities among the five ***approaches to inquiry***.

What Is New in This Edition

Since John wrote the first, second, and third editions of this book, the content of the book has both remained the same and changed. In this edition, we introduce several new ideas:

- We have updated the key book readings introduced in Chapter 1 to reflect advances within each approach in narrative research (Clandinin, 2013), in phenomenology (van Manen, 2014), in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015), and in case study (Yin, 2014).
- Based on reviewers' feedback, we have revised Chapter 2 on the philosophical assumptions and the interpretive frameworks used by qualitative researchers and expanded our use of studies to illustrate differences among interpretive frameworks.
- Across all the chapters, we have responded to reviewers' comments about the need for further inclusivity and diversity in our examples and references. We have added descriptions of each of the further readings at the end of the chapter to help readers to decide which readings are most appropriate for their needs.
- In Chapter 3, we have expanded the section on ethical issues that traces the types of qualitative ethical dilemmas likely to arise at different phases of the research process that are developed in subsequent chapters. In this way, we are continuing to expand the ethical coverage in this book in response to reviewer feedback.
- We have added two sections in Chapter 3 for guiding qualitative researchers' thinking about their own study by describing features of a good qualitative study and design considerations for engaging readers. We have added two visuals summarizing when to use qualitative research and describing phases of research, and revised the section on writing structures for a proposal.
- In discussing each of the five approaches in this book in Chapter 4, we have added visuals and enhanced descriptions related to "defining characteristics" of the approach. Readers will have our best assessment of the key features of the approach summarized in one place in the end of chapter tables. Also in Chapter 4, we have incorporated new visuals, updated key book readings, and added recent literature for each approach.
- We have updated the illustrative articles used in the book in Chapter 5 and replaced some outdated references with new examples. Consequently, we have added two new articles: one in ethnographic research (Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2015) and one in case study research (Frelin, 2015).
- In Chapter 6, we have provided additional purpose statement examples to include an alternative to the "scriptlike" purpose. In the discussion about subresearch questions, we have provided examples for each type of approach to guide subdivision of the central question into several parts.
- In the area of data collection in Chapter 7, we needed to better integrate issues of data management (e.g., data storage and security) as well as articles reflective of developments in data collection (e.g., computer-mediated, visual methods) to keep pace with new ways of gathering qualitative data.
- We also expanded the coverage of ethical considerations in earlier editions of this book and added two new visuals summarizing the procedures for preparing and conducting interviews and observations.

- In data analysis, in Chapter 8, we have expanded our discussion of new techniques that are being discussed for analyzing the data in each of the five approaches, cited recent references inclusive of audiovisual materials, and revised the visual representation of data analysis spiral. We also have updated the discussion about the use of memoing, developing interpretations, and representing data. In the description of qualitative computer software analysis packages, we have updated resources and added a section related to "how to decide whether to use a computer program."
- In the writing of qualitative research, as presented in Chapter 9, we have added more information about ethical considerations and reflexivity as well as their importance and guidance for incorporating into a qualitative study.
- We have updated the descriptions of validation and reliability perspectives and strategies in Chapter 10, including new visual summaries and greater detail in comparing standards of quality across the five approaches.
- At the end of each chapter, you will find a "check-in" section to practice specific skills introduced in the chapter. Many of these exercises have been rewritten in this new edition to reflect our growing understanding of the specific skills that a qualitative researcher needs to know.
- In the final chapter, we have added the text of the initial qualitative gunman case study and have not only "turned" the case study into a narrative project, a phenomenology, a grounded theory study, and an ethnography but we have also made more explicit what changes actually occurred in this reworking.
- As with all new editions, we have updated the references to include recent books on qualitative research methods as well as select journal articles that illustrate these methods.

Many areas have also remained the same as in the third edition. These include the following:

- The core characteristics of qualitative research have remained essentially the same.
- An emphasis on social justice as one of the primary features of qualitative research is continued in this edition. While a social justice orientation may not be for everyone, it has again been given primacy in the recent edition of the *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).
- The need for considering ethical issues both in advance and responding as issues emerge throughout the research process.
- A healthy respect exists for variations within each of the five approaches. We have come to understand that there is no single way to approach an ethnography, a grounded theory study, and so forth. We have selectively chosen what we believe to be the most popular approaches within each approach and to highlight books that emphasize them.

- On a similar note, we have continued to use the five approaches that have now stood the test of time since the first edition. This is not to say that we have not considered additional approaches. Participatory action research, for example, could certainly be a sixth approach, but we include some discussion of it in the interpretive framework passages in Chapter 2 (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998). Also, discourse analysis and conversational analysis could certainly have been included as an additional approach (Cheek, 2004), but we have added some thoughts about conversational approaches in narrative approaches. Mixed methods, too, is sometimes so closely associated with qualitative research that it is considered one of the genres (see Saldaña, 2011). However, we see mixed methods as a distinct methodology from qualitative inquiry and one that bridges qualitative and quantitative research. Further, it has its own distinct literature (see Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011); thus, we wanted to limit the scope of this book to qualitative approaches. Accordingly, we have chosen to keep the initial five approaches and to expand within these five approaches.
- We have continued to provide resources throughout the book for the qualitative researcher. We have included a detailed glossary of terms (and have added terms from the last edition), an analytic table of contents that organizes the material in this book according to the five approaches, and complete journal articles that model designing and writing a study within each of the five approaches. For both inexperienced and experienced researchers, we highlighted key resources at the ends of chapters for further reading that can extend the material in this book.
- The term used in the first edition, *traditions*, has now been replaced by *approaches*, and we have continued this use of terms in subsequent editions. This approach signals that we not only want to respect past approaches but we also want to encourage current practices in qualitative research. Other writers have referred to the approaches as "strategies of inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), "varieties" (Tesch, 1990), or "methods" (Morse & Richards, 2002). By ***research design***, we refer to the entire process of research from conceptualizing a problem to writing research questions and on to data collection, analysis, interpretation, and report writing (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). Yin (2009) commented, "The design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions" (p. 29). Hence, we included in the specific design features from the broad philosophical and theoretical perspectives to the quality and validation of a study.

Positioning Ourselves

You need to know some information about our backgrounds in order to understand the approach adopted in this book. John was trained as a quantitative researcher about 40 years ago. By the mid-1980s, John was asked to teach the first qualitative research course at my university, and he volunteered to do so. This was followed a few years

later with the writing of the first edition of this book. While John has expanded his repertoire to mixed methods as well as qualitative research, he continually returns to a strong interest in qualitative research. Over the years, John has evolved into an applied research methodologist with a specialization in research design, qualitative research, and mixed methods research. Interestingly, Cheryl was also trained as a quantitative researcher within the biological natural sciences. When working as a high school science teacher, she began to question the limitations of the quantitative evidence test scores for assessing and reporting student learning. Instead, she began to draw upon more qualitative evidence to inform her communication with students and parents. This was followed by a return to graduate school to gain expertise in qualitative research methods and eventually to engage in the emerging field of mixed methods research. As an applied researcher and program evaluator, she is committed to building research capacity through mentoring her students and collaborators in rigorous methods across a variety of organizational settings.

This background explains why we write from the standpoint of conveying an understanding of the process of qualitative research (whether you want to call it the scientific method or something else), a focus on strong methods features such as extensive qualitative data collection, rigorous data analysis through multiple steps, and the use of computer programs. Moreover, John has developed a fascination with the structure of writing, whether the writing is a qualitative study, a poem, or creative nonfiction. An enduring interest of John's has been the *composition* of qualitative research. This compositional interest flows into how to best structure qualitative inquiry and to visualize how the structure shifts and changes given different approaches to research. For Cheryl, a persistent research interest in promoting use of findings and processes has lead to her focus on providing enhanced *access* to what findings are generated and seeking diverse *formats* for how research and evaluation is communicated.

John's interest in structured features has often placed him in the camp of post-positivist writers in qualitative inquiry (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), but like most researchers, he defies easy categorization. In an article in *Qualitative Inquiry* about a homeless shelter (Miller, Creswell, & Olander, 1998), John's ethnography assumed a realist, a confessional, and an advocacy stance. Also, he is not advocating the acceptance of qualitative research in a "quantitative" world (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991). Qualitative inquiry represents a legitimate mode of social and human science exploration, without apology or comparisons to quantitative research. In the same way, Cheryl draws on her experiences as a quantitative and mixed methods researcher in her qualitative work but is careful to maintain the essential characteristics of qualitative research that we discuss in Chapter 3.

John also tends to be oriented toward citing numerous ideas to document articles; to incorporate the latest writings from the ever-growing, vast literature of qualitative inquiry; and to advance an applied, practical form of conducting research. For example, it was not enough for John to convey philosophical assumptions of

qualitative inquiry in Chapter 2; he also had to construct a discussion around how these philosophical ideas are applied in the design and writing of a qualitative study. John concurs with Agger (1991), who says that readers and writers can understand methodology in less technical ways, thereby affording greater access to scholars and democraticizing science. We continue to seek and be influenced by our interactions with beginning and more experienced researchers who are expanding their methodological expertise in our courses, workshops, and conferences. Always before us as we write is the picture of a beginning master's or doctoral student who is learning qualitative research for the first time. Because this picture remains central in our thinking, some may say that we oversimplify the craft of research. This picture may well blur the image for a more seasoned qualitative writer—and especially one who seeks more advanced discussions and who looks for problematizing the process of research. It is important to both of us that, in this book, we provide access to learning about five qualitative research approaches in a way that stimulates the beginning of a qualitative inquiry journey.

Definition of Qualitative Research

We typically begin a book about qualitative research by posing a definition for it. This seemingly uncomplicated approach has become more difficult in recent years. We note that some extremely useful introductory books to qualitative research these days do not contain a definition that can be easily located (Morse & Richards, 2002; Weis & Fine, 2000). Perhaps this has less to do with the authors' decision to convey the nature of this inquiry and more to do with a concern about advancing a "fixed" definition. Other authors advance a definition. The evolving definition by Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2000, 2005, 2011) in their *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* conveys the ever-changing nature of qualitative inquiry from social construction, to interpretivism, and then on to social justice in the world. We include their latest definition here:

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3)

Although some of the traditional approaches to qualitative research, such as the "interpretive, naturalistic approach" and "meanings," are evident in this definition,

the definition also has a strong orientation toward the impact of qualitative research and its ability to transform the world.

As applied research methodologists, our working definitions of qualitative research incorporate many of the Denzin and Lincoln elements, but it provides greater emphasis on the design of research and the use of distinct approaches to inquiry (e.g., ethnography, narrative). We adopt the following definition:

> Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (Creswell, 2013, p. 44)

Selection of the Five Approaches

Those undertaking qualitative studies have a baffling number of choices of approaches. One can gain a sense of this diversity by examining several classifications or typologies. Tesch (1990) provided a classification consisting of 28 approaches organized into four branches of a flowchart, sorting out these approaches based on the central interest of the investigator. Wolcott (1992) classified approaches in a "tree" diagram with branches of the tree designating strategies for data collection. Miller and Crabtree (1992) organized 18 types according to the "domain" of human life of primary concern to the researcher, such as a focus on the individual, the social world, or the culture. In the field of education, Jacob (1987) categorized all qualitative research into "traditions" such as ecological psychology, symbolic interactionism, and holistic ethnography. Jacob's categorization provided a key framework for the first edition of this book. Lancy (1993) organized qualitative inquiry into discipline perspectives, such as anthropology, sociology, biology, cognitive psychology, and history. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) have organized and reorganized their types of qualitative strategies over the years.

Table 1.1 provides these and other various classifications of qualitative approaches that have surfaced over the years. This list is not meant to be exhaustive of the possibilities; it is intended to illustrate the diversity of approaches recommended by different authors and how the disciplines might emphasize some approaches over others.

Looking closely at these classifications, we can discern that some approaches appear consistently over the years, such as ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, and case studies. Also, a number of narrative-related approaches have

TABLE 1.1 • Qualitative Approaches Mentioned by Authors and Their Disciplines/Fields

Authors	Qualitative Approaches			Disciplines
Jacob (1987)	Ecological psychology Ethnography of communication	Holistic ethnography Symbolic interactionism	Cognitive anthropology	Education
Munhall and Oiler (1986)	Phenomenology Historical research	Grounded theory	Ethnography	Nursing
Lancy (1993)	Anthropological perspectives Case studies	Sociological perspectives Personal accounts	Biological perspectives Cognitive studies Historical inquiries	Education
Strauss and Corbin (1990)	Grounded theory Life histories	Ethnography Conversational analysis	Phenomenology	Sociology, nursing
Morse (1994)	Phenomenology Grounded theory	Ethnography	Ethnoscience	Nursing
Moustakas (1994)	Ethnography Empirical phenomenological research	Grounded theory Heuristic research	Hermeneutics Transcendental Phenomenology	Psychology
Denzin and Lincoln (1994)	Case studies Ethnomethodology Biographical	Ethnography Interpretative practices Historical	Phenomenology Grounded theory Clinical research	Social sciences
Miles and Huberman (1994)	Approaches to Qualitative Data Analysis: Interpretivism	Social anthropology	Collaborative social research	Social sciences
Slife and Williams (1995)	Categories of Qualitative Methods: Ethnography	Phenomenology	Studies of artifacts	Psychology
Denzin and Lincoln (2005)	Performance, critical, and public ethnography Grounded theory	Interpretive practices Life history Clinical research	Case studies Narrative authority Participatory action research	Social sciences
Marshall and Rossman (2015)	Ethnographic approaches	Phenomenological approaches	Sociolinguistic approaches (e.g., critical genres)	Education

(Continued)

TABLE 1.1 ● (Continued)

Authors	Qualitative Approaches			Disciplines
Saldaña (2011)	Ethnography Case study Narrative inquiry Evaluation research Critical inquiry	Grounded theory Content analysis Arts-based research Action research Autoethnography	Phenomenology Mixed methods research Investigative journalism	Arts (theater)
Denzin and Lincoln (2011)	Research Strategies: Design Ethnography Ethnomethodology Historical method Clinical research	 Case study Phenomenology Grounded theory Action and applied research	 Ethnography, participant observation, performance Life history, testimonio	
Mertens (2015)	Types of Qualitative Research: Ethnographic research Grounded theory	 Case study Participatory action research	 Phenomenological research	Education, psychology

been discussed, such as life history, autoethnography, and biography. With so many possibilities, how was the selection decision made to focus on the five approaches presented in this book?

The choice of the five approaches resulted from reflecting on personal interests, selecting different approaches popular in the social science and health science literature, and electing to choose representative discipline orientations. Each of us have had personal experience with each of the five and have advised students and participated on research teams using these qualitative approaches. Beyond these personal experiences, our reading the qualitative literature has been ongoing and our learning continues. The five approaches discussed in this book reflect the types of qualitative research that we most frequently see in the social, behavioral, and health science literature. It is not unusual, too, for authors to state that certain approaches are most important in their fields (e.g., Morse & Field, 1995). Also, we prefer approaches with systematic procedures for inquiry. The books we have chosen to illustrate each approach tend to have procedures of rigorous data collection and analysis methods that are attractive to beginning researchers. The primary books chosen for each approach also represent different discipline perspectives in the social, behavioral, and health sciences. This is an attractive feature to broaden the

audience for the book and to recognize the diverse disciplines that have embraced qualitative research. For example, narrative originates from the humanities and social sciences, phenomenology from psychology and philosophy, grounded theory from sociology, ethnography from anthropology and sociology, and case studies from the human and social sciences and applied areas such as evaluation research.

Key Book Readings

The primary ideas that we use to discuss each approach come from select books. More specifically, we will rely heavily on two books on each approach. These are the books that we highly recommend for you to get started in learning a specific approach to qualitative inquiry. These books reflect classics often cited by authors as well as new works. They also reflect diverse disciplines and perspectives. Please see the essential readings for each chapter listed under the Further Readings heading appearing after each chapter summary.

Narrative Research

Clandinin, D. J. (2013). *Engaging in narrative inquiry*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

In this book, Jean Clandinin articulates her intention to "return to the question of what it is that narrative inquirers do" (p. 18). Chapter 2 is noteworthy for her practical guidance using detailed descriptions and examples of educational research what it means to think and act narratively.

Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Catherine Riessman uses cross-disciplinary exemplars alongside detailed descriptions for four specific methods of narrative analysis (thematic, structural, dialogic/performance, and visual). A unique contribution is the discussion of visual analysis and how images can be used within qualitative research.

Phenomenology

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Clark Moustakas contributes a description of a heuristic process in phenomenological analysis. His practical instructions in the systematic interpretation of interview transcripts is helpful for extracting themes common across interviews or unique to an interview and then creating a conceptual link.

van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing.* Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Max van Manen describes the evolution of key phenomenological ideas, presents a range of methods, and discusses current issues. Among the key contributions is his summary of seven criteria for appraising phenomenological reporting (see p. 355).

Grounded Theory

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

In this new edition, Kathy Charmaz provides additional examples from varied disciplines and professions as well as reflections from scholars about using grounded theory. Features of the second edition include further details related to the coding and writing processes including guidelines and examples.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

A new pedagogical feature of the fourth edition by Julie Corbin and Anselm Strauss called Insider Insights provides viewpoints from former students and colleagues to enrich the reading experience. Of particular note is a summary of analyses processes (see pp. 216–219).

Ethnography

Fetterman, D. M. (2010). *Ethnography: Step-by-step* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

David Fetterman offers discussions about the basic features of ethnography and the use of theory. The chapter on anthropological concepts provides a useful connection between the cyclical processes of acquiring ethnographic knowledge and human life. This, along with the analytical strategies described in Chapter 5, make this resource required reading.

Wolcott, H. F. (2008). *Ethnography: A way of seeing* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MD: AltaMira.

A good understanding of the nature of ethnography, the study of groups, and the development of an understanding of culture is provided by Harry Wolcott. In particular, his emphasis on both the artistic and common sense elements involved in fieldwork provides a unique perspective.

Case Study

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

Through his personable style, Robert Stake offers insights gained from experience along with illustrative examples. The book reads differently than a typical text, emphasizing the "art" involved in conducting a case study and the role of researcher's intuition.

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and method* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Robert Yin adds breadth and depth to this new edition with end-of-chapter tutorials. His emphasis on systems and procedures for generating reliable findings and valid interpretations is particularly noted in designs (see Chapter 2), data collection (see Chapter 4), and analysis (see Chapter 5).

Audience

Although multiple audiences, both known and unknown, exist for any text (Fetterman, 2010), we direct this book toward academics and scholars affiliated with the social, human, and health sciences. Examples throughout the book illustrate the diversity of disciplines and fields of study including sociology, psychology, education, nursing, family medicine, allied health, urban studies, marketing, communication and journalism, educational psychology, family science and therapy, and other social and human science areas.

Our aim is to provide a useful text for those who produce scholarly qualitative research in the form of journal articles, theses, or dissertations. We have pitched the level of discussion to be suitable for upper-division students and beyond into graduate school. For graduate students writing master's theses or doctoral dissertations, we compare and contrast the five approaches in the hope that such analysis helps in establishing a rationale for the choice of a type to use. For beginning qualitative researchers, we introduce the philosophical and interpretive frameworks that shape qualitative research followed by the basic elements in designing a qualitative study. We feel that understanding the basics of qualitative research is essential before venturing out into the specifics of one of the qualitative approaches. We begin each chapter with an overview of the topic of the chapter and then go into how the topic might be addressed within each of the five approaches. While discussing the basic elements, we suggest several books aimed at the beginning qualitative researcher that can provide a more extensive review of the basics of qualitative research. Such basics are necessary before delving into the five approaches. A focus on comparing the five approaches throughout this book provides an introduction for experienced researchers to approaches that build on their training and research experiences.

Organization

Following this introduction and the list of key book resources, in Chapter 2 we provide an introduction to the philosophical assumptions and interpretive frameworks that inform qualitative research. We emphasize how they might be written into a qualitative study. In Chapter 3, we review the basic elements for designing a qualitative study. These elements begin with a definition of *qualitative research*, the reasons for using this approach, and the phases in the process of research. In Chapter 4, we provide an introduction to each of the five approaches of inquiry: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study research. The chapter includes an overview of the elements of each of the five approaches. Chapter 5 continues this discussion by presenting five published journal articles (one on each approach with the complete articles in Appendices B–F), which provide good illustrations of each of the approaches. By reading our overview in Chapter 4 and then reviewing a journal article that illustrates the approach, you can develop a working knowledge of an

approach. Choosing one of the books we recommend for the approach in this chapter and beginning a mastery of it for your research study can then expand this knowledge.

These five preliminary chapters form an introduction to the five approaches and an overview of the process of research design. They set the stage for the remaining chapters, which take up in turn each step in the research process: writing introductions to studies (Chapter 6), collecting data (Chapter 7), analyzing and representing data (Chapter 8), writing qualitative studies (Chapter 9), and validating and evaluating a qualitative study (Chapter 10). Throughout these design chapters, we start with the basics of qualitative research and then expand the discussion to advance and compare the five types.

As a final experience to sharpen distinctions made among the five approaches, we present Chapter 11, in which we present a gunman case study (Asmussen & Creswell, 1995), and "turn" the story from a case study into a narrative biography, a phenomenology, a grounded theory study, and an ethnography. This culminating chapter brings the reader full circle to examining the gunman case in several ways, an extension of John's 1994 Vail seminar experience in looking at the same problem from diverse qualitative perspectives.

Philosophical Assumptions and Interpretive Frameworks

Whether we are aware of it or not, we always bring certain beliefs and ***philosophical assumptions*** to our research. Sometimes these are deeply ingrained views about the types of problems that we need to study, what research questions to ask, or how we go about gathering data. These beliefs are instilled in us during our educational training through journal articles and books, through advice dispensed by our advisors, and through the scholarly communities we engage at our conferences and scholarly meetings. The difficulty lies first in becoming aware of these assumptions and beliefs and second in deciding whether we will actively incorporate them into our qualitative studies. Often, at a less abstract level, these philosophical assumptions inform our choice of theories that guide our research. Theories are more apparent in our qualitative studies than are philosophical assumptions, and researchers, often trained in the use of theories, typically make them explicit in research studies.

Qualitative researchers have underscored the importance of not only understanding the beliefs and theories that inform our research but also actively writing about them in our reports and studies. This chapter highlights various philosophical assumptions that have occupied the minds of qualitative researchers for some years and the various theoretical and ***interpretive frameworks*** that enact these beliefs.

A close tie does exist between the philosophy that one brings to the research act and how one proceeds to use a framework to shroud his or her inquiry.

This chapter will help you begin to explore your philosophical assumptions and inform decisions about the influence of theories in your qualitative research. We do this by presenting a framework for understanding how both philosophy and theory fit into the large schema of the research process. Then we present details about philosophical assumptions common to qualitative researchers, consider the types of philosophical assumptions, and explore how they are often used or made explicit in qualitative studies. Finally, various interpretive frameworks are suggested that link back to philosophical assumptions with embedded commentary related to how these frameworks play out in the actual practice of research.

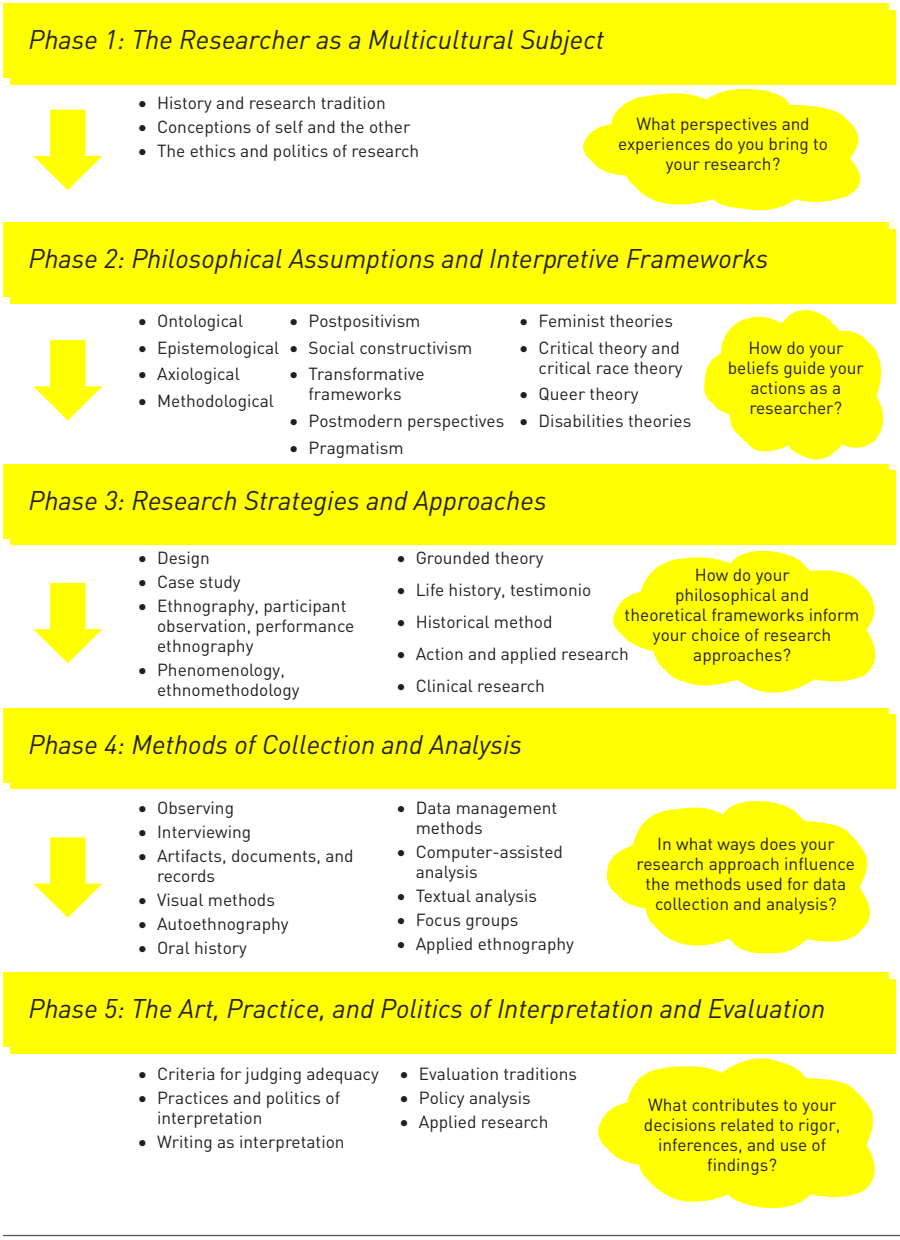
Questions for Discussion

- Where do philosophy and interpretive frameworks (theory) fit into the overall process of research?
- Why is it important to understand the philosophical assumptions?
- What four philosophical assumptions exist when you choose qualitative research?
- How are these philosophical assumptions used and written into a qualitative study?
- What types of interpretive frameworks are used in qualitative research?
- How are interpretive frameworks written into a qualitative study?
- How are philosophical assumptions and interpretive frameworks linked in a qualitative study?

Situating Philosophy and Interpretive Frameworks Within the Research Process

An understanding of the philosophical assumptions behind qualitative research begins with assessing where it fits within the overall process of research, noting its importance as an element of research, and considering how to actively write it into a study. To help in this process, we use a framework to guide understanding of how philosophical assumptions and interpretive frameworks (paradigm perspectives and theoretical orientations) are situated within and influential to the research process. *Philosophy* means the use of abstract ideas and beliefs that inform our research. We know that philosophical assumptions are typically the first ideas in developing a study, but how

FIGURE 2.1 • Situating Philosophy and Interpretive Frameworks Within the Research Process



Source: Adapted from Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 12). Used with permission, SAGE.

they relate to the overall process of research remains a mystery. It is here that adapting an overview of the process of research compiled by Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 12), as shown in Figure 2.1, helps us to situate philosophy and interpretative frameworks into perspective in the research process. The questions embedded within each phase help you begin to explore the philosophical assumptions you bring to research.

This conceptualization of the research process begins in Phase 1 with the researchers considering what they bring to the inquiry, such as their personal history, views of themselves and others, and ethical and political issues. Inquirers often overlook this phase, so it is helpful to have it highlighted and positioned first in the levels of the research process. In Phase 2 the researcher brings to the inquiry certain philosophical assumptions. These are stances taken by the researcher that provide direction for the study, such as the researcher's view of reality (ontology), how the researcher knows reality (epistemology), the value-stance taken by the inquirer (axiology), and the procedures used in the study (***methodology***). These assumptions, in turn, are often applied in research through the use of ***paradigms*** and theories (or, as we call them, interpretive frameworks). Paradigms are a "basic set of beliefs that guides action" (Guba, 1990, p. 17). These beliefs are brought to the process of research by the investigator and they may be called worldviews (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). ***Theories or theoretical orientations***, on the other hand, are found in the literature and they provide a general explanation as to what the researcher hopes to find in a study or a lens through which to view the needs of participants and communities in a study. Granted, the difference between the philosophical assumptions, paradigms, and theoretical orientation is not always clear, but sorting out what exists at a broad philosophical level (assumptions) and what operates at a more practical level (interpretive frameworks) is a helpful heuristic.

In Phase 2, we find the philosophical and paradigm/theoretical interpretative frameworks addressed in this chapter. The following chapters in this book are devoted, then, to the Phase 3 research strategies, called approaches in this book, that will be enumerated as they relate to the research process. Finally, the inquirer engages in Phase 4 methods of data collection and analysis, followed by Phase 5, the interpretation and evaluation of the data. Taking Figure 2.1 in its entirety, we see that research involves differing levels of abstraction from the broad assessment of individual characteristics brought by the researcher on through the researcher's philosophy and theory that lay the foundation for more specific approaches and methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Also implicit in Figure 2.1 is the importance of having an understanding of philosophy and interpretative frameworks that inform a qualitative study.

Philosophical Assumptions

Why Philosophy Is Important

We can begin by thinking about why it is important to understand the philosophical assumptions that underlie qualitative research and to be able to articulate them in a research study or present them to an audience. Huff (2009) is helpful in articulating the importance of philosophy in research.

- *Direction of research goals and outcomes*. How we formulate our problem and research questions to study is shaped by our assumptions and, in turn, influences how we seek information to answer the questions. A cause-and-effect type of question in which certain variables are predicted to explain an outcome is different from an exploration of a single phenomenon as found in qualitative research.

- *Scope of training and research experiences*. These assumptions are deeply rooted in our training and reinforced by the scholarly community in which we work. Granted, some communities are more eclectic and borrow from many disciplines (e.g., education), while others are more narrowly focused on studying specific research problems, using particular methods, and adding certain research knowledge.

- *Basis of evaluative criteria for research-related decisions*. Unquestionably, reviewers make philosophical assumptions about a study when they evaluate it. Knowing how reviewers stand on issues of epistemology is helpful to author–researchers. When the assumptions between the author and the reviewer diverge, the author's work may not receive a fair hearing, and conclusions may be drawn that it does not make a contribution to the literature. This unfair hearing may occur within the context of a graduate student presenting to a committee, an author submitting to a scholarly journal, or an investigator presenting a proposal to a funding agency. On the reverse side, understanding the differences used by a reviewer may enable a researcher to resolve points of difference before they become a focal point for critique.

The question as to whether key assumptions can change and/or whether multiple philosophical assumptions can be used in a given study needs to be addressed. Our stance is that assumptions can change over time and over a career, and they often do, especially after a scholar leaves the enclave of his or her discipline and begins to work in more of a trans- or multidisciplinary way. Whether multiple assumptions can be taken in a given study is open to debate, and again, it may be related to research experiences of the investigator, his or her openness to exploring using differing assumptions, and the acceptability of ideas taken in the larger scientific community of which he or she is a part. Looking across the four philosophical assumptions described next can be helpful for monitoring individual changes over time.

Four Philosophical Assumptions

What are the philosophical assumptions made by researchers when they undertake a qualitative study? These assumptions have been articulated throughout the past 20 years in the various editions of the *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2000, 2005, 2011) and as the "axiomatic" issues advanced by Guba and Lincoln (1988) as the guiding philosophy behind qualitative research. These beliefs have been called philosophical assumptions, epistemologies, and ontologies (Crotty, 1998); broadly conceived research methodologies (Neuman, 2000); and alternative knowledge claims (Creswell, 2009). They are beliefs about ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (what counts as knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified),

axiology (the role of values in research), and methodology (the process of research). In this discussion, we will first discuss each of these philosophical assumptions, detail how they might be used and written into qualitative research, and then link them to different interpretive frameworks that operate at a more specific level in the process of research (see Table 2.1).

The ***ontological*** issue relates to the nature of reality and its characteristics. When researchers conduct qualitative research, they are embracing the idea of multiple realities. Different researchers embrace different realities, as do the individuals being studied and the readers of a qualitative study. When studying individuals, qualitative researchers conduct a study with the intent of reporting these multiple realities. Evidence of multiple realities includes the use of multiple forms of evidence in themes using the actual words of different individuals and presenting different perspectives. For example, when writers compile a phenomenology, they report how individuals participating in the study view their experiences differently (Moustakas, 1994).

TABLE 2.1 ● Philosophical Assumptions With Implications for Practice

Assumption	Questions	Characteristics	Implications for Practice (Examples)
Ontological	What is the nature of reality?	Reality is multiple as seen through many views.	The researcher reports different perspectives as themes develop in the findings.
Epistemological	What counts as knowledge? How are knowledge claims justified? What is the relationship between the researcher and that being researched?	Subjective evidence is obtained from participants; the researcher attempts to lessen the distance between himself or herself and that being researched.	The researcher relies on quotes as evidence from the participant as well as collaborates, spends time in field with participants, and becomes an "insider."
Axiological	What is the role of values?	The researcher acknowledges that research is value-laden and that biases are present in relation to their role in the study context.	The researcher openly discusses values that shape the narrative and includes his or her own interpretation in conjunction with those of participants.
Methodological	What is the process of research? What is the language of research?	The researcher uses inductive logic, studies the topic within its context, and uses an emerging design.	The researcher works with particulars (details) before generalizations, describes in detail the context of the study, and continually revises questions from experiences in the field.

With the ***epistemological*** assumption, conducting a qualitative study means that researchers try to get as close as possible to the participants being studied. Therefore, subjective evidence is assembled based on individual views. This is how knowledge is known—through the subjective experiences of people. It becomes important, then, to conduct studies in the "field," where the participants live and work—these are important contexts for understanding what the participants are saying. The longer researchers stay in the field or get to know the participants, the more they "know what they know" from firsthand information. For example, a good ethnography requires prolonged stay at the research site (Wolcott, 2008a). In short, the qualitative researcher tries to minimize the "distance" or "objective separateness" (Guba & Lincoln, 1988, p. 94) between himself or herself and those being researched.

All researchers bring values to a study, but qualitative researchers make their values known in a study. This is the ***axiological*** assumption that characterizes qualitative research. In a qualitative study, the inquirers admit the value-laden nature of the study and actively report their values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered from the field. We say that researchers "position themselves" by identifying their "positionality" in relation to the context and setting of the research. Among the aspects described are researcher's social position (e.g., gender, age, race, immigration status), personal experiences, and political and professional beliefs (Berger, 2015). In an interpretive biography, for example, the researcher's presence is apparent in the text, and the author admits that the stories voiced represent an interpretation of the author as much as the subject of the study (Denzin, 1989).

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

Writing Philosophical Assumptions Into Qualitative Studies

One further thought is important about philosophical assumptions. In some qualitative studies they remain hidden from view; they can be deduced, however, by the discerning reader who sees the multiple views that appear in the themes, the detailed rendering of the subjective quotes of participants, the carefully laid-out biases of the researcher, or the emerging design that evolves in ever-expanding levels of abstraction from description to themes to broad generalizations. In other studies, the philosophy is made explicit by a special section in the study—typically in the description of the characteristics of qualitative inquiry often found in the methods section. Here, the inquirer talks about

ontology, epistemology, and other assumptions explicitly and details how they are exemplified in the study. The form of this discussion is to convey the assumptions, to provide definitions for them, and to discuss how they are illustrated in the study. References to the literature about the philosophy of qualitative research round out the discussion. Sections of this nature are often found in doctoral dissertations, in journal articles reported in major qualitative journals, and in conference paper presentations where the audience may ask about the underlying philosophy of the study. While there are infinite ways for an author to go about describing their philosophical assumptions and implications for research practice, we offer three examples from journal articles to complement the examples provided.

EXAMPLE 2.1

JOURNAL ARTICLE EXAMPLES OF DESCRIPTIONS OF UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS

Notice how the philosophical assumptions are made explicit in each of the following journal articles:

a) Alongside the phenomenological approach description for the study examining the meaning that people with liver failure ascribe to the experience of waiting for a liver transplant (Brown, Sorrell, McClaren, & Creswell, 2006, p. 122)

b) Integrated within the description of the Piliriqatigiinniq Partnership Community Health Research model guiding the study within the methods section (Healey, 2014, p. e134–135)

c) Embedded within researcher positionality description under the heading of Positioning the Mobile Ethnographer (Jungnickel, 2014, p. 642)

Interpretive Frameworks

In Figure 2.1, the philosophical assumptions are often applied within interpretive frameworks that qualitative researchers use when they conduct a study. Thus, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) consider the philosophical assumptions (ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology) as key premises that are folded into interpretive frameworks used in qualitative research. What are these interpretive frameworks? They may be paradigms, or beliefs that the researcher brings to the process of research, or they may be theories or theoretical orientations that guide the practice of research. Paradigm interpretative frameworks may be ***postpositivism, social constructivism***,

transformation, and postmodern. Theories may be ***social science theories*** to frame their theoretical lens in studies, such as the use of these theories in ethnography (see Chapter 4). Social science theories may be theories of leadership, attribution, political influence and control, and hundreds of other possibilities that are taught in the social science disciplines. On the other hand, the theories may be ***social justice theories*** or advocacy/participatory theories seeking to bring about change or address social justice issues in our societies. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state, "We want a social science committed up front to issues of social justice, equity, nonviolence, peace, and universal human rights" (p. 11).

The interpretive frameworks seem to be ever expanding, and the list in Figure 2.1 does not account for all that are popularly used in qualitative research. Another approach that has been extensively discussed elsewhere is the realist perspective that combines a realist ontology (the belief that a real world exists independently of our beliefs and constructions) and a constructivist epistemology (knowledge of the world is inevitably our own construction; see Maxwell, 2012). Consequently, any discussion (including this one) can only be a partial description of possibilities, but a review of several major interpretive frameworks can provide a sense of options. The participants in these interpretive, theoretically oriented projects often represent underrepresented or marginalized groups, whether those differences take the form of gender, race, class, religion, sexuality, or geography (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005) or some intersection of these differences.

Postpositivism

Those who engage in qualitative research using a belief system grounded in postpositivism will take a scientific approach to research. They will employ a social science theoretical lens. We will use the term *postpositivism* rather than *positivism* to denote this approach because postpositivists do not believe in strict cause and effect but rather recognize that all cause and effect is a probability that may or may not occur. Postpositivism has the elements of being reductionistic, logical, empirical, cause-and-effect oriented, and deterministic based on a priori theories. We can see this approach at work among individuals with prior quantitative research training and in fields such as the health sciences in which qualitative research often plays a supportive role to quantitative research and must be couched in terms acceptable to quantitative researchers and funding agents (e.g., the a priori use of theory; see Barbour, 2000). A good overview of postpositivist approaches is available in Phillips and Burbules (2000) and Churchill, Plano Clark, Prochaska-Cue, Creswell, and Onta-Grzebik (2007).

In practice, postpositivist researchers view inquiry as a series of logically related steps, believe in multiple perspectives from participants rather than a single reality, and espouse rigorous methods of qualitative data collection and analysis. They use multiple levels of data analysis for rigor, employ computer programs to assist in their analysis, encourage the use of validity approaches, and write their qualitative studies

in the form of scientific reports, with a structure resembling quantitative articles (e.g., problem, questions, data collection, results, conclusions). Our approaches to qualitative research have been identified as belonging to postpositivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), as have the approaches of others (e.g., Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). We do tend to use this belief system, although neither of us would not characterize all of our research as framed within a postpositivist qualitative orientation (e.g., see the constructivist approach in McVea, Harter, McEntarffer, & Creswell, 1999; the social justice perspective in Miller, Creswell, & Olander, 1998; and the pragmatic approach in Henderson, 2011). This postpositivist interpretive framework is exemplified in the systematic procedures of grounded theory found in Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) and Corbin and Strauss (2007, 2015), the analytic data analysis steps in phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994), and the data analysis strategies of case comparisons of Yin (2014).

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism (which is often described as interpretivism; see Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Mertens, 2015) is another paradigm or worldview. In social constructivism, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences—meanings directed toward certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories or ideas. The goal of research, then, is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation. Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. In other words, they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social construction) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives. Rather than starting with a theory (as in postpositivism), inquirers generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning. Examples of writers who have summarized this position are Burr (2015), Crotty (1998), Lincoln and Guba (2000), and Schwandt (2007).

In terms of practice, the questions become broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation, a meaning typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons. The more open-ended the questioning, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life setting. Thus, constructivist researchers often address the "processes" of interaction among individuals. They also focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants. Researchers recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they "position themselves" in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences. Thus the researchers make an interpretation of what they find, an interpretation shaped by their own experiences and background; for example, see study impetus described by Brown et al. (2006). The researcher's intent, then, is to make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world. This is why qualitative research is often called interpretive research.

We see the constructivist worldview manifest in phenomenological studies, in which individuals describe their experiences (Moustakas, 1994), and in the grounded theory perspective of Charmaz (2014), in which she grounds her theoretical orientation in the views or perspectives of individuals.

Transformative Frameworks

Researchers might use an alternative framework, a ***transformative framework***, because the postpositivists impose structural laws and theories that do not fit marginalized individuals or groups and the constructivists do not go far enough in advocating action to help individuals. The basic tenet of this transformative framework is that knowledge is not neutral and it reflects the power and social relationships within society; thus, the purpose of knowledge construction is to aid people to improve society (Mertens, 2003). These individuals include marginalized groups such as indigenous groups, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender persons, queers, and societies that need a more hopeful, positive psychology and resilience (Mertens, 2009, 2015).

Qualitative research, then, should contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of participants, the institutions in which they live and work, or even the researchers' lives. The issues facing these marginalized groups are of paramount importance to study—issues such as oppression, domination, suppression, alienation, and hegemony. As these issues are studied and exposed, the researchers provide a voice for these participants, raising their consciousness and improving their lives (for an educational example, see Job et al., 2013). Describing it as participatory action research, Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998) embrace features of this transformative framework:

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

Other researchers who embrace this worldview are Fay (1987) and Heron and Reason (1997). In practice, this framework has shaped several approaches to inquiry. Specific social issues (e.g., domination, oppression, inequity) help organize the research questions. Not wanting to further marginalize the individuals participating in

the research, transformative inquirers collaborate with research participants. They may ask participants to help with designing the questions, collecting the data, analyzing it, and shaping the final report of the research. In this way, the "voice" of the participants becomes heard throughout the research process and the research products meaningful for all involved. It is encouraging to see guiding research resources emerge from the perspectives of marginalized groups (e.g., Lovern & Locust, 2013; Mertens, Cram, & Chilisa, 2013). The research also contains an action agenda for reform, a specific plan for addressing the injustices of the marginalized group. These practices will be seen in the ethnographic approaches to research with a social justice agenda found in Denzin and Lincoln (2011) and in the change-oriented forms of narrative research (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004).

Postmodern Perspectives

Thomas (1993) calls postmodernists "armchair radicals" (p. 23) who focus their critiques on changing ways of thinking rather than on calling for action based on these changes. ***Postmodernism*** might be considered a family of theories and perspectives that have something in common (Slife & Williams, 1995). The basic concept is that knowledge claims must be set within the conditions of the world today and in the multiple perspectives of class, race, gender, and other group affiliations. These conditions are well articulated by individuals such as Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, Giroux, and Freire (Bloland, 1995). These are negative conditions, and they show themselves in the presence of hierarchies, power and control by individuals, and the multiple meanings of language. The conditions include the importance of different discourses, the importance of marginalized people and groups (the "other"), and the presence of "metanarratives" or universals that hold true regardless of the social conditions. Also included is the need to "deconstruct" texts in terms of language, their reading and their writing, and the examining and bringing to the surface of concealed hierarchies as well as dominations, oppositions, inconsistencies, and contradictions (Bloland, 1995; Clarke, 2005; Stringer, 1993). Denzin's (1989) approach to "interpretive" biography, Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) approach to narrative research, and Clarke's (2005) perspective on grounded theory draw on postmodernism in that researchers study turning points, or problematic situations in which people find themselves during transition periods (Borgatta & Borgatta, 1992). Regarding a "postmodern-influenced ethnography," Thomas (1993) writes that such a study might "confront the centrality of media-created realities and the influence of information technologies" (p. 25). Thomas also comments that narrative texts need to be challenged (and written), according to the postmodernists, for their "subtexts" of dominant meanings.

Pragmatism

There are many forms of ***pragmatism***. Individuals holding an interpretive framework based on pragmatism focus on the outcomes of the research—the actions, situations, and consequences of inquiry—rather than antecedent conditions (as in postpositivism).

There is a concern with applications—"what works"—and solutions to problems (Patton, 1990). Thus, instead of a focus on methods, the important aspect of research is the problem being studied and the questions asked about this problem (see Rossman & Wilson, 1985). Cherryholmes (1992) and Murphy (1990) provide direction for the basic ideas:

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

In practice, the individual using this worldview will use multiple methods of data collection to best answer the research question, will employ multiple sources of data collection, will focus on the practical implications of the research, and will emphasize the importance of conducting research that best addresses the research problem. In the discussion here of the five approaches to research, you will see this framework at work when ethnographers employ both quantitative (e.g., surveys) and qualitative data collection (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) and when case study researchers use both quantitative and qualitative data (Luck, Jackson, & Usher, 2006; Yin, 2014).

Feminist Theories

Feminism draws on different theoretical and pragmatic orientations, different international contexts, and different dynamic developments (Olesen, 2011). ***Feminist research approaches*** center on and make problematic women's diverse situations and the institutions that frame those situations. Research topics may include a postcolonial thought related to forms of feminism depending on the context of nationalism, globalization and diverse international contexts

(e.g., sex workers, domestic servants), and work by or about specific groups of women, such as standpoint theories about lesbians, women with disabilities, and women of color (Olesen, 2011). The theme of domination prevails in the feminist literature as well, but the subject matter is often gender domination within a patriarchal society. Feminist research also embraces many of the tenets of postmodern and poststructuralist critiques as a challenge to the injustices of current society. In feminist research approaches, the goals are to establish collaborative and nonexploitative relationships, to place the researcher within the study so as to avoid objectification, and to conduct research that is transformative. Reinharz (1992) concludes that the use of diverse research methods during the previous two decades has greatly benefited feminist scholarship. Recent critical trends address protecting indigenous knowledge and the intersectionality of feminist research (e.g., the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, able-bodiedness, and age; Olesen, 2011). Noteworthy among these emerging conversations about intersectionality of feminist theory is the application of a transformative paradigm with social justice (Thornton Dill & Kohlman, 2012) and with ***critical race theory*** (Chepp, 2015).

One of the leading scholars of this approach, Lather (1991), comments on the essential perspectives of this framework. Feminist researchers see gender as a basic organizing principle that shapes the conditions of their lives. It is "a lens that brings into focus particular questions" (Fox-Keller, 1985, p. 6). The questions feminists pose relate to the centrality of gender in the shaping of our consciousness. The aim of this ideological research is to "correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position" (Lather, 1991, p. 71). Another writer, Stewart (1994), translates feminist critiques and methodology into procedural guides. She suggests that researchers need to look for what has been left out in social science writing, and to study women's lives and issues such as identities, sex roles, domestic violence, abortion activism, comparable worth, affirmative action, and the way in which women struggle with their social devaluation and powerlessness within their families. Also, researchers need to consciously and systematically include their own roles or positions and assess how they impact their understandings of a woman's life. In addition, Stewart (1994) views women as having agency, the ability to make choices and resist oppression, and she suggests that researchers need to inquire into how a woman understands her gender, acknowledging that gender is a social construct that differs for each individual. An example of such a study that was undertaken by Therberge (1997) focused on the place of physicality in the practice of women's hockey. Stewart (1994) highlights the importance of studying power relationships and individuals' social position and how they impact women. Finally, she sees each woman as different and recommends that scholars avoid the search for a unified or coherent self or voice.

Recent discussions indicate that the approach of finding appropriate methods for feminist research has given way to the thought that any method can be made feminist (Deem, 2002; Moss, 2007). Olesen (2011) summarizes the current state of feminist research under a number of transformative developments (e.g., globalization,