



SECOND EDITION

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Bridging the Conceptual, Theoretical,
and Methodological

SHARON M. RAVITCH
NICOLE MITTENFELNER CARL



Qualitative Research

Second Edition

We dedicate this book to

Our Children:

Maxwell and Evelyn, who were born during the writing of this book.

Ari and Lev, who continue to grow, learn, and teach, as we write.

We hope this book will contribute to your generation and beyond through the good work of those who read this and use research as a tool to help heal our world.

And Our Students:

Whose questions, passions, concerns, and commitments have shaped this book beyond words.

Thank you for your engaging learning, for your curiosity, and for being our teachers.

Curiosity as restless questioning, as movement toward the revelation of something hidden, as a question verbalized or not, as search for clarity, as a moment of attention, suggestion, and vigilance, constitutes an integral part of the phenomenon of being alive. There could be no creativity without the curiosity that moves us and sets us patiently impatient before a world that we did not make, to add to it something of our own making.

—Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of Freedom

Qualitative Research

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Second Edition

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FOREWORD

Frederick Erickson

Qualitative research is not magic, but it is sometimes done as sleight of hand, as if to pull a rabbit out of a hat. And like the stage performance of a skilled magician, each successive flourish can appear easy to accomplish, from the point of view of the audience. Yet much is going on behind the scenes that the audience does not see. Explaining the backstage aspects of qualitative inquiry—its fundamental aims and conduct—can be done either simplistically—cookbook fashion, which makes it look deceptively simple and straightforward—or with elaborate complexity—invoking unexplained distinctions in epistemology, ontology, and axiology in impenetrable discourse that mystifies the reader. What this revised, second edition book achieves is something quite different: It presents qualitative inquiry as a deliberative enterprise that is careful in its rationales, in its ethics, and in its handling of evidence and representation, discussing these matters with clarity, cogency, and subtlety.

Presently there are many variants in qualitative inquiry, with differing groundings in assumptions and value positions—a wide spectrum ranging from classic noninterventionist ethnography through a variety of approaches to action research. As newer methods and perspectives have developed over the past 50 years, so have academically xenophobic tendencies toward within-group tribalism and siloing, with proponents of a given approach looking inward with mutual appreciation among fellow supporters and outward with invidious recrimination toward “others.” This has sometimes approached the level of “paradigm wars” across successive academic generations within the overall field of qualitative inquiry. This book is distinctive in that it not only takes an ecumenical position on the diversity of current research approaches and their attendant lifeworlds, but also engages that diversity directly. It presents specific comparison and contrast among approaches, discussing variants and their grounding assumptions in even-handed ways and providing citation lists whose reach consistently extends across silo boundaries. It’s not easy to play fair and write with clarity in such discussion, and the authors are distinctively successful in doing that.

Bridging, a term used in the subtitle of the book, is an image of connection, and this book certainly accomplishes that, making connections horizontally and vertically. Horizontal connections manifest across successive chapters, from initial consideration of the purposes and intellectual foundations of qualitative inquiry (essays in methodology as distinct from method), through discussion of methods—various research tools and various aspects of relationship between researchers and those who are studied—concluding with discussion of data discovery, data analysis, and writing, with thoughtful consideration of choices involved in narrative reporting, representations of the everyday practices and meaning perspectives of those who are being studied.

Vertical connections also manifest within each chapter, across differing expository voices. There is the voice of the authors, who write from their considerable experience in conducting qualitative inquiry and teaching others how and why to do it. There are also voices of students, who write from their experience of beginning to learn qualitative inquiry and finding that this is not as easy as it might have looked at first glance. In addition, there are the voices of other scholars who do qualitative inquiry and write about how it is done well. This three-layered combination of voices, some very junior in experience and others very senior, constructs an especially rich conversation among diverse participants in differing communities of the practices of qualitative inquiry—a conversation that draws the reader into dialogue with the text as a fourth voice, a fourth layer in the conversation.

The first edition of this book featured rich illustrative presentation of instructional exercises and examples of students' work. This revised edition provides even more of that material—whole texts of reflective memos by students on various topics, including literature reviews, research design plans, reflections on ethical issues in qualitative research and writing, and conceptual mapping discussions. These appear as items in an extensive collection of appendixes, and a list of pertinent appendixes is presented at the end of each chapter. The authors have also revised and expanded analytic charts and other graphic displays. Together with breadth and currency in citations lists and literature review, all this pedagogical scaffolding is especially useful for newcomers to qualitative inquiry.

Just as I do when I review fieldnotes or watch video clips or listen to audio recordings of interviews again and again, so as to apprehend, reflect upon, and digest their contents more and more thoroughly, so I read a book like this iteratively. I invite the reader to do the same. Read the whole book once. Then read it again. After that, begin to review single chapters repeatedly. Take some time to hunt down the writing of various authors who have been cited. Then go back to the chapter in which that citation appeared. Whether you are an experienced qualitative researcher or a beginner, you will find that this ruminative approach pays off, in fresh ideas and in deeper insights into what you may already know. After a few years come back to this book again. You won't get it all at once.

PREFACE

Reading This Book: A Note to Students

Welcome, students.

This book is written with you in mind—your learning goals and needs, your diverse backgrounds and interests, the specific contexts of your learning, and possibly your anxieties, concerns, and desire for balance between theory and action as you learn about qualitative research. We seek to support you as you endeavor to learn about qualitative research and about becoming a qualitative researcher. Our overarching goal is to provide you with a solid understanding of what qualitative research is and how to do it with ethics and rigor. This book seeks to help you cultivate and integrate theoretical, methodological, and conceptual knowledge; to help you see their interaction; and to help you understand the central concepts, topics, and skills you need to engage in rigorous, valid, and respectful qualitative research.

This book comes out of Sharon's decades of teaching qualitative methods to students across programs, disciplines, fields, and continents, as well as Sharon's and Nicole's individual and shared work as applied researchers in a variety of contexts, including education, community, and corporate contexts across the globe. It also emerged from our co-teaching of an introductory qualitative methods course at the University of Pennsylvania over the period of 2 years, during which we paid careful attention to students' questions, interests, goals, and confusions about qualitative research and developed creative ways to respond to these. Throughout the book, we bring our experiences of learning with and from our students about what they are interested in, what they care about, and what they need to make sense of in the field of qualitative research. We hope you will find that the book supports you in your learning about qualitative research as a field as well as in your *doing* of qualitative research in ways that keep it lively, engaging, and meaningful.

This book is an answer to the many questions we've gotten over the years about how to learn the basics of qualitative research in a way that captures and teaches its complexity and nuances. Balancing these two goals—communicating the foundations and processes of qualitative research with clarity and simplicity while at the same time capturing its complexity and multilayeredness—has been the central challenge of writing this book. We have endeavored to write this book for both new researchers as well as those who have experience with qualitative research. Our hope is that whether you are new to qualitative research or not, reading this book will develop and deepen your understanding of an approach to research that seeks, designs for, and engages what we think of as *criticality in qualitative research*, which we believe bridges the theoretical, methodological, and conceptual aspects of qualitative research.

This book is unique in its approach to conceptualizing and explaining qualitative research in a number of ways. First, while we want the content to be accessible, we do not want it to be watered down. Throughout the book, we discuss qualitative research in complex yet straightforward ways that seek to keep it complicated but not overwhelming. Second, we have designed the book, to the extent possible, to be used interactively, that is, as a guide for an experiential and dialogic approach to learning about and engaging in qualitative research. To ensure that the text is both accessible and complex and that it supports active engagement in your learning, we include a variety of features throughout:

- We define central concepts throughout the book as we explain ideas and processes so that you do not have to interrupt your reading to look up too many terms.
- We include a variety of perspectives, concepts, and terms from the key research methods scholars about specific topics so as to familiarize you with a range of viewpoints and help you understand the lay of the land.
- We include an array of student work with multiple examples of each kind of researcher-generated text as a way to show qualitative research and how it is constructed as well as to shed light on some of the thought processes that students make transparent in their work. In some cases, we annotate aspects of students' work to highlight key features and explain choices they have made.
- We include a variety of specific recommended practices, exercises, and thought-provoking questions to help you engage in and think actively about the concepts and processes we describe.
- We share many real-life examples of questions, issues, and situations that stem from our research and that of our students to humanize the research process and offer thoughts about possible scenarios that arise through the research process.
- At the end of each chapter, we include questions for further reflection to help you integrate the learning from the chapter.
- We include resources for further reading (at the end of each chapter, throughout some chapters, and in notes) that include texts on specific topics that are beyond the scope of this book but that you will likely need as you develop your specific research studies.

The organization of the book, and of each chapter, reflects our desire to balance rigor, engagement, and accessibility. Each chapter begins with an overview and goals that set the stage for the chapter and list key objectives that you should understand and be able to discuss with thought partners after you finish reading it. The chapters are arranged thematically, and the headings are structured so that you can easily refer to specific topics and the practices that you can engage in as you learn and relearn them over time. We provide multiple examples, which include a range of memos, sample

conceptual framework narratives and graphics, a variety of research proposals, a sample research report, sample data collection instruments, consent forms, samples of qualitative coding and data analysis, and concept mapping exercises, which are embedded in the chapters as well as in the appendixes.

We hope this book will help make your journey into qualitative research enjoyable and that you will engage and reengage with the book as you move through the phases of your own research, now and in the future. We believe strongly in the power of qualitative research to inform and change the world, and we hope our passion and grounded optimism will carry with you as you move into your own research.

USING THIS BOOK: A NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS

As you know, a major issue in teaching introductory-level qualitative research courses is that there are few texts that both help students understand the processes and procedures of research design and the conduct of research and speak to methodology as it relates to reflexivity, positionality, ethics, collaboration, and rigor from a more critical angle; thus, the readings in such courses tend to be divided between more functional/transactional guides to doing research and more theoretical/conceptual pieces on research epistemology, axiology, and ontology, which are typically not as accessible to novice researchers or those less interested in postmodern and poststructural language, which tends to alienate and obscure. We consider the separation of these aspects of qualitative research to be quite problematic at this early developmental stage of researcher identity, knowledge, and skills formation. This book seeks to integrate these approaches so that students gain insight into the overarching frames and values of qualitative research in direct relation to methods choices and procedures.

The book is meant to be engaging and lively while also thought-provoking and instructional. We hope that you and your students will find the book useful, engaging, challenging, and supportive of energized teaching and learning about qualitative research.

OUR APPROACH: CRITICALITY, REFLEXIVITY, COLLABORATION, AND RIGOR

Many of the most commonly used books on qualitative research focus on qualitative research design in a fairly traditional and narrow sense, meaning that they typically address the pragmatic aspects of research, focusing primarily on research questions, data collection, and writing up findings. This book seeks to complicate and contextualize qualitative research in a more complex (yet still accessible) manner. We emphasize an approach to qualitative research design and to the entire research process that is based on the themes of *criticality*, *reflexivity*, *collaboration*, and *rigor*. These themes are the cornerstones of this book, as they highlight the ethical, contextual, and relational nature of qualitative research that is not only ideological but also deeply methodological.

Throughout the book, we discuss how the paradigmatic values of qualitative research must be actively considered throughout every stage of the research process with a focus on the importance of critically conceptualizing context and issues of representation. Importantly, the book does this in a purposefully accessible way intended for novice as well as more experienced researchers interested in understanding (and teaching) research design in more methodologically sophisticated and critical ways.

We discuss specific research methods—and the concepts that guide them—that help you, as new or somewhat experienced researchers, to approach research participants as experts of their own experiences (Jacoby & Gonzales, 1991; van Manen, 1990) and to consider the methodological issues, concerns, and processes related to the subjectivity of your decisions and sense-making as researchers throughout the research process. We do so by examining specific methods that centralize the iterative, reflexive, systematic, and recursive ways that you cultivate your approach to developing your research design (and your broader methodological approach) to achieve a more refined and specific approach to research rigor and validity. Throughout each chapter, we animate the qualitative research process as decidedly ideological, political, and subjective, and we underscore the ethical, relational, and critical stances that qualitative researchers can cultivate to engage in research that embodies the foundational values of the qualitative paradigm.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

In the first three chapters, we establish our approach to qualitative research and introduce what we consider to be horizontal values of qualitative research: criticality, reflexivity, collaboration, and rigor. We also provide specific procedures and strategies for achieving these ideals. In Chapter 1, we define and situate qualitative research as a field of inquiry and approach to research. Chapter 2 discusses the role of conceptual frameworks in all aspects and phases of qualitative research. Chapter 3 offers an ecological approach to qualitative research design that engages and supports criticality in qualitative research.

We address ways to engage in reflexivity in data collection in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, we provide a concrete discussion of the primary modes and methods of qualitative data collection as well as how to approach these methods, their strengths, and potential challenges. Chapter 6 defines, reframes, and complicates the concept and related processes of validity as more than a set of procedures and approaches validity as both an active methodological process and a research goal. Chapter 7 discusses research ethics and the intricacies of taking a relational and reciprocal approach to research. Chapter 8 details approaches to qualitative data analysis and describes an integrative approach to data analysis that critically explores and addresses the interpretative power in/of analysis and the need for an ethical and critical stance on data analysis. In Chapter 9, we describe a three-pronged approach to data analysis that includes the ongoing processes of *data organization and management*, *immersive engagement*, and *writing and representation*. In these chapters, we underscore the iterative, reflexive, recursive, and formative aspects of collecting and analyzing qualitative data as well as conducting valid research. We offer multiple recommended practices to help you apply what we have discussed and to push you to critically consider what can sometimes seem like technical acts.

Chapters 10 and 11 focus on writing in qualitative research. Chapter 10 specifically discusses the final research report and addresses the power inherent in qualitative research and representation; we argue for respectful, authentic, and ethical representations of participants and settings. Chapter 11 addresses the many considerations related to writing qualitative research proposals and includes an annotated example of a dissertation research proposal.

In the Epilogue, we revisit the horizontal values of qualitative research and provide examples of alternative ways to think of and enact these important ideals.

We have created a robust collection of Appendixes to provide additional examples that illuminate the processes of conducting qualitative research. The Appendixes offer examples of memos, conceptual frameworks, instruments, a full pilot study, analysis plans, data displays, coding schemes, conference and grant proposals, consent forms, and assent forms.

We hope that our passion for research and belief in the power of equitable research to contribute to the world will inspire you to retain an appreciation for the real considerations and steps necessary to engage in rigorous and ethical qualitative research. For us, the possibility born out of equitable research that seeks local and contextualized knowledge generation through an attention to rigor, validity, and ethics is at the heart of qualitative research and is a goal toward which we should all strive.

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Sharon M. Ravitch is a professor of practice at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education. She engages in numerous applied research projects in India, serving as a visiting scholar at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in Mumbai and working as a co-researcher and key resource expert in policy advocacy, professional development, and community-based participatory research related to corporate social responsibility through TISS's corporate social responsibility hub. She is involved in the design and implementation of assessment and evaluation of statewide performance through mixed-methods research in the Ministry of Human Resource Development's major policy initiative, Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), a countrywide reform

initiative aimed to resurrect India's state public university system. Ravitch is also an expert adviser at the Center for Academic Leadership and Education Management at TISS. The center provides professional development and policy advocacy support to school education leaders across India. Ravitch works in the center's capacity-building program to collaboratively develop case studies and technology-innovation frameworks for the higher education and K–12 sectors using a participatory approach. She received the prestigious GIAN Scholar Award from the government of India for 2016–2017 and the RUSA Scholar Award for 2017–2018. Ravitch also received a Fulbright Fellowship to engage in research and applied development work in India from 2017 to 2019.

Ravitch is also principal investigator of Semillas Digitales, a multiyear applied development research initiative in rural Nicaragua. Her research integrates across the fields of qualitative research, education, applied development, cultural anthropology, and human development and has four main strands: (1) practitioner research for sustainable, stakeholder-driven professional and institutional development and innovation; (2) international applied development research that works from participatory and action research approaches (projects currently in India and Nicaragua); (3) ethnographic and participatory evaluation research; and (4) leader inquiry, education, and professional development.

Ravitch has published five books: *Applied Research for Sustainable Change: A Guide for Education Leaders* (with Nicole Carl, 2019); *Qualitative Research: Bridging the Conceptual, Theoretical, and Methodological* (1st ed., with Nicole Carl, 2016); *Reason and Rigor: How Conceptual Frameworks Guide Research* (2012; 2nd ed., with Matthew Riggan, 2016); *School Counseling Principles: Diversity and Multiculturalism* (2006); and *Matters of Interpretation:*

Reciprocal Transformation in Therapeutic and Developmental Relationships With Youth (with Michael Nakkula, 1998).

Ravitch earned two master's degrees from Harvard University, one in risk and prevention and another in human development and psychology, and a doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania in an interdisciplinary program that combined education, anthropology, and sociology.



Nicole Mittenfelner Carl is a postdoctoral fellow in the Teaching, Learning, and Leadership Division at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education. She received her doctorate in educational leadership from the University of Pennsylvania in 2017. Carl teaches courses related to qualitative research methods, practitioner research for educational leaders, and mentoring strategies for veteran teachers coaching first-year teachers.

Carl's research has three primary foci: (1) professional development and coaching for teachers and leaders, (2) how practitioners and students can conduct research to improve their schools, and (3) the social and cultural contexts of schooling and its implications for students, teachers, parents, and school leaders.

Carl has been conducting qualitative research for more than a decade, beginning in 2005, when she was awarded a Mellon Fellowship. Since then, she has led and participated in numerous qualitative and mixed-methods research projects. She recently co-authored a text for Harvard Education Press, *Applied Research for Sustainable Change: A Guide for Education Leaders*, that exemplifies ways for practitioners to use local research as a driver of school change. Carl has also published several articles on students' experiences with schooling, democratizing schooling, the impacts of educational policies on teachers and leaders, and applied research in peer-reviewed journals.

Carl has worked with school leaders, teachers, and students in various settings (public and independent) to consider ways to use research to drive school improvement. She has also led a multiyear, multisite evaluation of the impact of these projects on the schools and individuals involved. She continues to research ways that practitioners can conduct and use research in their schools, and she supports educators in the implementation of these projects.

Drawn from her experiences as a teacher, a teacher leader, and a teacher coach, Carl is working on a book that focuses on research from a multiyear ethnographic study of a K–8 school in a low-income neighborhood in a large city, describing the ways that hidden agendas of social class immobility and inequity shape schooling experiences. The research looked at socialization structures in schools, the role of cultural and social capital, the importance of qualitative research, ways to incorporate student voice, and how policy is experienced by students and teachers.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

CHAPTER OVERVIEW AND GOALS

The overarching goal of this book is to provide you with a better understanding of qualitative research and to help you develop tools to effectively conduct qualitative research. As the title of the book implies, it is our goal to bridge the methodological (how to design and conduct qualitative research), theoretical (philosophical underpinnings of phenomena), and conceptual (how the researcher understands the topic, study, and related contexts) while teaching you the technical aspects of qualitative research, including data collection and analysis. Thus, this book integrates the theoretical, methodological, and conceptual topics and skills you need to engage in rigorous, valid, and respectful research.

We begin this chapter with an overview of the qualitative research process so that you have an understanding of the broad components and processes that comprise a qualitative study. After highlighting the specific processes, we define qualitative research and overview its history, values, assumptions, and components. We then introduce the four key values of qualitative research (what we refer to as *horizontal values*) that we emphasize throughout the book: criticality, reflexivity, collaboration, and rigor. Next, we briefly overview some of the primary approaches researchers use to conduct this research. The chapter ends with a discussion about the power of and possibilities for qualitative research.

By the end of this chapter you will better understand

- The key components and processes of qualitative research
- The core values, beliefs, and assumptions on which qualitative research is based
- The role of the researcher in qualitative research
- The way the horizontal values of qualitative research—criticality, reflexivity, collaboration, and rigor—influence, shape, and guide all aspects of qualitative research
- An overview of some of the more commonly used approaches to qualitative research

AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESSES OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

It is our goal that, after reading this book, you will have a better understanding not only of how to conduct qualitative research but also of the theoretical, methodological, and conceptual complexities that comprise qualitative research. *Broadly defined, qualitative research uses interpretive research methods as a set of tools to understand individuals, groups, and phenomena in contextualized ways that reflect how people make meaning of and interpret their own experiences, themselves, each other, and the social world.* We begin this chapter with a visual and narrative overview of the processes of conducting qualitative research.

Qualitative research is not a linear process. Figure 1.1 overviews (and admittedly oversimplifies) the intersecting processes of qualitative research as it is difficult to demonstrate the fluidity of qualitative research in graphic form. The processes of qualitative research continuously interact and build off one another in cyclical fashion. For example, the process of developing research questions stems from an interest, problem, identification of a gap in literature, or some combination of these. However, once you develop your research question(s), you will continue to consult theory throughout your study. During data analysis, you will again revisit theoretical literature to help you understand the relationship of your data to theories and extant research.

A qualitative study begins with an interest, problem, or question, as indicated in the top center of Figure 1.1. To develop this interest, you'll seek out a variety of sources to get a lay of the land on the topic, including reading a range of texts and talking with individuals knowledgeable about the topic or setting. This is represented in the graphic dialogic engagement (talking to others) and reviewing literature. As you become more familiar with the literature relevant to your topic, you develop a primary research question (and possibly a set of research questions) that guides your study. This is often a back-and-forth process, and you continue to review and consult literature throughout your study. After developing research questions, you begin to design your study. This includes determining which methods (interviews, focus groups, observational fieldnotes, etc.) will best help you answer the research questions. The selection of methods often necessitates consulting literature as well. During the design process, you determine where the research will take place (i.e., research setting or site), determine who will be involved in the study (i.e., a sampling plan for selecting the study participants), develop a plan for the sequence of how data will be collected, and indicate how data will be analyzed. This research design is often developed through the creation of a research proposal, ideally vetted by others, in which you detail how you will go about conducting your research study. See Chapter 11 for a discussion of proposals.

Methods and research instruments (the tools used to collect data) are often piloted (or tested) as well as rehearsed and vetted to ensure that they are going to generate the data necessary to answer your research question(s); this is illustrated in what we call *formative design* in Figure 1.1. Formative design can lead to many positive changes in a study, such as refining your research questions, methods, and/or study instruments as well as revisiting literature. After making necessary adjustments, you collect data. As you analyze your data by the means detailed in your research design, you also include

Figure 1.1 The Dynamic Elements of Qualitative Research



efforts to ensure that your data are valid and trustworthy. These efforts include a variety of strategies that we discuss in depth in Chapter 6. One example of an important validity strategy is to check in with participants to determine what they think about your analysis and interpretations; we refer to this strategy as participant validation (often called *member checks*).

As you continue to analyze the data that you collect, you also revisit and review literature that helps you make sense of what you are learning. During this process, you develop research findings that respond to the guiding research questions. What you learn in your study is typically disseminated, most often through a research report or other research product. As represented in Figure 1.1, the development of each of these aspects and phases of research is integrated within and through the building of a conceptual framework, which is the focus of the next chapter.

The multidirectional arrows in Figure 1.1 signify that each of these steps is not as discrete and sequential as it may seem but is rather intersecting and **recursive**. Recursive means that each of the steps informs other steps. The intersectional nature of these processes becomes more apparent throughout reading the rest of this book. Also, while Figure 1.1 provides a graphical presentation of what the processes of qualitative research look like, it cannot capture everything. The figure does not depict how qualitative research is also exciting, nerve-wracking, and messy—from the confusions of design to the issues that emerge in the selection of research settings and participants to various aspects of conducting fieldwork and struggling with analysis and reporting. The goal of this book is to make each and all of the processes of qualitative research as well as the values and priorities underlying the processes clear. After reading this text, we hope you feel prepared to engage in qualitative research that fits your goals and helps you develop and respond to questions that are important to you.

Qualitative research is recursive in that it builds and depends on all of its component parts. For example, your research questions are often informed by your personal and professional experiences, the literature you have read,

and the ways that you view and understand the world. Furthermore, as you implement your research, the preliminary data collected inform (and may lead you to refine) your research questions.

DEFINING AND SITUATING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research involves systematic and contextualized research processes to interpret the ways that humans view, approach, and make meaning of their experiences, contexts, and the world. A primary goal of this book is to both simplify (in terms of making it accessible) and complicate (help show its many layers) qualitative research and its methods in ways that help new researchers understand the values that guide this research. Even in complicating qualitative research, we also make clear that it is doable and that, while subjective, contextual, and not generalizable (in a quantitative sense of that term), this research is incredibly valuable to knowledge construction in a variety of ways that we discuss throughout the book.

Qualitative research, as a formalized field, emerged in the 1960s in part as a critique of the **positivist** tradition that dominated research across most disciplines. Qualitative research focuses on context, interpretation, subjectivity, representation, and the non-neutrality of the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Schwandt, 2015). Qualitative inquiry certainly existed and generated scholarship prior to the 1960s. For example, already widely known and practiced since the 1940s and 1950s were the ethnographic tradition from cultural anthropology (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) and the action-based research and participatory action research (described in Table 1.2) traditions,

which include a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Lewin, 1946).

Four philosophical assumptions inform qualitative research, which are based on ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological understandings. In terms of **ontology** (how you understand reality), qualitative researchers embrace multiple realities and truths, including those of the researchers and participants, and see this as a central stance of being and of researching human experience. For **epistemology** (how you view and gain knowledge as well as know what you know), qualitative researchers contend that knowledge is developed from individuals' subjective experiences. Furthermore, qualitative researchers believe that knowledge is shared rather than residing solely in the minds or texts of "experts." **Axiology** (what you value), qualitative researchers identify, acknowledge, and reckon with their values and biases, as well as of those of participants, and to see how these values influence the research process and product. An example of this is that for many researchers, Western knowledge is valued more than indigenous knowledges across the world. With respect to **methodology** (your approach to research and the research procedures you use), qualitative researchers believe research to be interpretive and structured as naturalistic inquiry; therefore, qualitative researchers tend to use inductive methods (i.e., insights emerging from data) and acknowledge the role of the researcher in shaping all aspects of a study. It is important to note that while these philosophical assumptions generally inform qualitative research, there are multiple approaches, methods, and beliefs that inform qualitative research.¹

Despite its association with specific disciplines and theories, qualitative research is not constrained to any specific tradition, framework, discipline, or method; it is, rather, an "umbrella term that encompasses many approaches" (Atkinson, Coffey, & Delamont, 2001, p. 7). Unifying principles of qualitative research include (a) **interpretivist** assumptions, (b) context-specific and flexible methods, and (c) analysis methods that contextualize findings (Mason, 2002). Qualitative research is a mode of inquiry that centralizes the complexity and subjectivity of lived experience and values these aspects of human *being* and meaning making through methodological means. Broadly, interpretivism (in contrast to positivism) contends that humans, including the researcher and study participants, are the primary instruments in a study. Whereas in quantitative research, researchers use numbers to study relationships, in qualitative inquiry researchers are concerned with human feeling, experiences, and values. Central to interpretivist assumptions, qualitative researchers do not believe or claim that there are universal, static "Truths" but rather assert that there are multiple, situated truths and perspectives. Furthermore, context and contextualization are central to understanding any person, group, experience, or phenomena. Qualitative researchers question the interpretive role and authority of the researcher and acknowledge the subjectivity of all researchers. Related to this, **positionality**, which refers to a researcher's role and **social identity** in relation to the context and setting of the research, is a central consideration in qualitative research. In these ways, qualitative research has changed the way many researchers think about issues such as objectivity, interpretation, and the relationship between methods and study findings (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Qualitative researchers also pay close attention to the relational aspects of research, including how interpersonal dynamics and issues of power

and identity shape and mediate all aspects of the research process and ultimately the data and findings (Josselson, 2013; Steinberg & Cannella, 2012).

Key aspects of the positivist paradigm include a view of the world as consisting of unchanging, universally applicable laws as well as the belief that life events and social phenomena are/can be explained by knowledge of these universal laws and immutable truths (Hughes, 2001). Within this paradigm, the belief is that understanding these universal laws requires observation and recording of social events and phenomena in systematic ways that allow the “knower” to define the underlying principle or truth that is the “cause” for the event(s) to occur. Positivist research assumes that researchers are able to be objective and neutral.

Ontology concerns the nature of reality. In qualitative research, an ontological assumption is that there is not a single “Truth” or reality. Researchers, participants, and readers have differing realities, and a goal of qualitative research is to engage with, understand, and report these multiple realities.

Epistemology concerns the nature of knowledge, including how it is constructed and how it can be acquired. The epistemological assumption underlying qualitative research is that knowledge is developed through people’s subjective experiences and therefore conducting research in the places that people exist and make meaning. In qualitative research, everyone is positioned as having important knowledge about themselves and the world.

Axiology refers to the ways individuals make judgments based on their values. In research, axiology focuses on exploring the role of a researcher’s values and judgments throughout all stages of the research process. Indigenous methods scholar Bagele Chilisa (2012) avers

that axiology is “the analysis of values to better understand their meanings, characteristics, their origins, their purpose, their acceptance as true knowledge, and their influence on people’s daily experiences” (p. 21). Exploring your axiology is important since your values affect how you conduct your research and what you value and prioritize in your research process and findings.

Qualitative methodology refers to the research approach, design, methods, and implementation that shape the overall approach to the research in a study, including the related processes, understandings, theories, values, and beliefs that inform them. It includes the ways that your overall stance and approach to your empirical study shape your specific research methods for the collection and analysis of study data.

In qualitative research, researchers tend to use an interpretivist framework in which research is structured to gather information from people to explain their subjective realities. Broadly, the interpretivist framework aligns with qualitative research’s philosophical (epistemological, axiological, ontological, and methodological) assumptions. Qualitative researchers can use a general interpretivist framework or specific interpretivist frameworks, which include some of the following critical social theories: postpositivist, feminist, transformative, postmodernist, critical race, disability, queer, pragmatist, social constructivist, and so forth.

Positionality refers to the researcher’s role and identity in relation to the context and setting of the research specifically. For

example, you could be a practitioner in the setting, located as an expert, a combination of insider or outsider to the setting, a supervisor of employees, a member of community involved in the research, someone who shares a cultural or ethnic relationship with participants, and so on.

Social identity includes the intersectional² ways the researcher's gender, social class, race, sexual orientation, culture,

religious beliefs, language communities, ethnicity, and/or other identity markers are relevant to the research topic, participants, and/or setting. Furthermore, it is important to note that social identities are contextual and related to each other as different identity markers intersect in different social locations. In qualitative research, social location is sometimes used synonymously with social identity.³

The field of qualitative research has evolved into a vibrant, multifaceted, complex range of approaches and methodologies that are not easily grouped or defined. Qualitative research is used in and across multiple disciplines and has varying methodological practices. Qualitative research is open to multiple possibilities because it is not limited to any one discipline, theoretical perspective, or approach. Furthermore, the generative tensions in qualitative research continually push qualitative researchers to examine their assumptions, blind spots, and the ways that they reproduce dominance and privilege in and through research. Clearly, there is not one singular way to define or engage in qualitative research, and part of the process of becoming a qualitative researcher is clarifying your views on these aspects of research so that you can engage reflexively in your empirical studies.

There are shared perspectives and sensibilities across qualitative researchers and studies that help frame the broad array of approaches to it. To state it another way, qualitative research is not a monolith; despite sharing certain foundational ideas, there is great range and variation in approaches to qualitative research (Erickson, 2018). See Table 1.2 for a summary of some of the more commonly used approaches.

The field of qualitative research has developed significantly over time. A scan of the editions of *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (from the first edition in 1984 to its fifth edition in 2018) shows the growth of the field, including the development of multiple theoretical orientations and conceptual frameworks that guide qualitative research, improved and more sophisticated methodological frameworks and methods of data collection and analysis, and engagement with the representational aspects of qualitative inquiry and its relationship to issues of equity, discrimination, marginalization, and social transformation (Paris & Winn, 2014; L. T. Smith, 2012).

Looking across a range of texts devoted to qualitative research, there is deep and wide diversity in interpretive frames and approaches to qualitative inquiry.³ Beyond this diversity, qualitative research is often described in relation to quantitative research. Quantitative research is associated with positivism and involves data that are analyzed numerically through statistical or other mathematical means. We do not think that comparing quantitative and qualitative research is necessary, and in fact doing so often creates a false dichotomy. Many scholars describe qualitative research in relation to quantitative research to point out its underlying values and epistemologies. While for decades

(roughly 1970s–1990s) people spoke of “the paradigm wars”—referring to tension between qualitative and quantitative researchers and then between those engaged in different forms of qualitative research⁴—to many, the historic sense of acrimony between qualitative and quantitative researchers is no longer active since certain kinds of research questions require one or the other approach—or their strategic combination (what is known as mixed-methods research)—to gather the data need to respond to research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). However, it is important to note that this tension between the paradigms can also be understood as an artifact of many researchers’ ongoing efforts to keep such conversations and tensions alive in order to generate knowledge that is methodologically appropriate and sophisticated and to challenge norms that seek to constrain and delegitimize qualitative ways of knowing (Thomas, 2003).

While some qualitative researchers apply qualitative criteria and standards to quantitative research and some quantitative researchers apply their standards and validity criteria to qualitative research in ways that generate defensiveness and misunderstanding, many researchers work from the understanding that each paradigm has different goals and each research approach serves different purposes. Simply criticizing one approach or the other does not generate knowledge or support methodological appropriateness or sophistication.

As we discuss in subsequent chapters, you might choose to use quantitative methods alongside qualitative methods for a variety of reasons given the goals of a specific study and the concepts in the research questions. We recommend that researchers use methods that are best suited to generate the data necessary to answer the study’s research questions. We are neither wedded to the sole use of quantitative or qualitative methods nor wedded to a particular qualitative approach since, as we detail throughout this book, the chosen approach and related methods depend on the research questions and goals of a study as well as on other contextual variables. We discuss this in more depth as we explore the roles of conceptual frameworks in research in Chapter 2 and research design in Chapter 3.

KEY COMPONENTS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

For the reasons described above, we are hesitant to provide broad generalizations of qualitative research or to simply compare it with quantitative research. However, to give you an orientation, in Table 1.1 we describe what we consider the key components of qualitative research. Some of the shared axiological (values), epistemological (knowledge), ontological (reality), and methodological (research processes) stances of qualitative researchers include conducting fieldwork using naturalistic engagement, focusing on both describing and analyzing, seeking complexity and contextualization, situating the researcher as the primary instrument in the study, paying careful attention to process and relationships, maintaining fidelity to participants, focusing on meaning making, and placing primacy on inductive understandings and processes (Carl & Ravitch, 2018).

Of necessity, the components described in Table 1.1 are not exhaustive (to say the least) and are also a bit overgeneralized. However, this table highlights some of the

Table 1.1 Components of Qualitative Research

Fieldwork and naturalistic engagement	Qualitative research involves <i>fieldwork and naturalistic engagement</i> , which means that the researcher is physically present with the people in a community, institution, or other context to engage, observe, and record experience and behavior in a natural setting. What makes a setting “natural” can be debated. The important point here is that researchers are engaging with individuals in homes, schools, workplaces, and other settings that are authentic rather than contrived (Carl & Ravitch, 2018).
Descriptive and analytic	Qualitative research is both <i>descriptive and analytic</i> in that researchers are interested in understanding, describing, and ultimately analyzing the complex processes, meanings, and understandings that people have and make within their experiences, contexts, and milieus. The strategic combination of descriptive and analytic research questions and methods supports research products that can both describe and share thoughtful and generative analyses.
Complexity and contextualization	Qualitative research seeks <i>complexity and contextualization</i> in terms of how reality exists and lived experience unfolds in ways that are temporal, contextual, and individualized even as participants may share certain contexts, experiences, and perspectives. This is the heart of qualitative inquiry; that is, it is a methodological paradigm that actively seeks complexity given its central value that since real life is complex, the methods to study it must be as well.
Researcher as instrument	In qualitative research, the researcher is considered the <i>primary instrument</i> of the research throughout the research process, meaning that the subjectivity, social identity, positionality, and meaning making of the researcher shape the research in terms of its processes and methods and therefore shape the data and findings. Thus, the identity of the researcher is viewed as a central and vital part of the inquiry itself and must be engaged reflexively in order to address the methodological implications of this, including issues of validity engendered by research subjectivity.
Process and relationships	Qualitative researchers pay careful attention to <i>process and relationships</i> , meaning that there is an intentional focus on how the research process—including procedures, methods, and interpersonal dynamics—itself generates meaning and important frames for understanding data. In qualitative research, process and product are viewed as inextricably linked since how data collection is structured and enacted affects the nature and quality of the data it generates.
Fidelity to participants	Qualitative research shows <i>fidelity to participants</i> and their experiences rather than strict adherence to methods and research design. Thus qualitative research takes an emergent design approach to research design and implementation to preserve the researcher's ability to shift and refine the research to match the emerging complexity and realities of people as they emerge through the research. This quality of adaptiveness is central to protecting the authenticity of participants' experiences and responses.
Meaning and meaning making	Qualitative researchers are interested in <i>meaning and meaning making</i> , which entails a deep investment in understanding how people make sense of their lives and experiences, as well as how the meanings people make off/in their lives are socially and individually constructed within and directly in relation to social and institutional structures.
Inductive	The process of qualitative research is largely <i>inductive</i> in that the researcher builds concepts, hypotheses, and theories from data that are contextualized and that emerge from engagement with research participants (rather than coming in with predisposed or deductive hypotheses to prove).

central aspects of qualitative research in terms of its foundational beliefs, values, assumptions, and methodological dimensions and approaches. Later in this chapter, we discuss specific approaches to qualitative research that highlight some of the differences even in the face of these shared values and foci.

Central to qualitative research is the premise that individuals have expertise broadly and specifically in relation to their own experiences (Jacoby & Gonzales, 1991; van Manen, 1990, 2018). Qualitative research contends that there are multiple subjective realities, and as such, there is no goal of finding an objective or immutable “Truth.” Within qualitative research, people’s experiences and perspectives are embedded in the contexts that shape their lives, and how people experience aspects of their lives and the world is subjective and can change over time. *Thus, qualitative researchers are interested in people’s subjective interpretations of their experiences, events, and other inquiry domains.*

The Role of the Researcher in Qualitative Research

Because the researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative research, the role of the researcher is a central consideration in qualitative research. Researcher positionality and social identity are central to understanding the researcher’s role in every stage of the research process. Positionality is how the researcher’s role and identity intersect in relationship to the context and setting of the research. Positionality consists of the multitude of roles and relationships that exist between the researcher and the participants within and in relation to the research setting, topic, and broader contexts that shape it.

Sometimes researcher social identities and positionalities are conceptualized or discussed in ways that create **binaries** (such as polarized notions of insider and outsider relationships, of practitioners and scholars, or binaried racial, cultural, or gender categories). There tend to be a range and variation in the roles and positions (i.e., positionality) that researchers take up in relation to research participants and settings and the ways a researcher’s social identity is interpreted as well as how researchers interpret themselves. This might mean that researchers can be considered both insider and outsider; scholar and practitioner; supervisor and employee; teacher and student; member of multiple cultural, social, or thought communities; multiracial and multicultural; having a fluid gender identity; and so on (Henslin, 2013; Tisdell, 2008).

Each researcher has a set of roles and identities, which can shift and change over time. Part of engaging criticality in qualitative research is understanding these complexities and not seeing them as either/or identities but rather as both/and, meaning that roles and identities are always in complex interaction and intersection (hence the term *intersectionality* to connote that each person’s multiple social identities intersect within a broader social and political system of discrimination). As we discuss in Chapter 2, researcher positionality and social identity should be thought of as being in complex relationship as they relate to how a researcher engages with and understands the setting, participants, and study of phenomena in context. Macro-sociopolitical contexts shape social identities and positionalities, and these relationships are temporal, dynamic, and contextual. From our experience, researchers often approach the consideration of social identity and positionality as a kind of checklist of things to do at the outset of a study or as a mea culpa that seemingly absolves them of engaging with issues that the confluence

of identities and roles can create throughout all aspects of research. Thinking about and addressing issues of researcher positionality and identity should not be a checklist; these issues should constitute a vibrant source of inquiry and generative tension as researchers reflexively engages in their research. The examination of social identity and positionality is reflected in all aspects of the research process (e.g., developing research questions, engaging with [or excluding] theories, selecting and recruiting research participants, structuring interview protocols and other data collection instruments, interacting with research participants, analyzing data, sharing [or not] aspects of data and analyses with research participants). Throughout this book, we argue for **reflexivity** in the sense that considering positionality and social identity should be a complex, multifaceted, and systematic process in qualitative research. Building on this premise, we discuss methodological ways to engage this approach throughout each chapter of this book.

HORIZONTAL VALUES IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: CRITICALITY, REFLEXIVITY, COLLABORATION, AND RIGOR

Qualitative research involves **iterative** processes of interpretation, reflection, and sense-making. Because the researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative research, examining your researcher biases and assumptions and understanding how these impact your decisions is an ethical responsibility (see, e.g., Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998). In this regard, qualitative researchers ideally make deliberate methodological choices to acknowledge, account for, and approach researcher bias. To guide and inform these methodological choices and the processes that stem from them, the concepts of criticality, reflexivity, collaboration, and rigor are necessary to conducting ethical and valid qualitative research. These concepts are at the center of our conceptualization of qualitative research, as indicated in Figure 1.1, because they influence and inform all qualitative research processes.

We refer to these as horizontal values not because there is anything linear about them but because we believe that these are crucial concepts present throughout all phases and processes of qualitative research. As we discuss throughout the book, the research questions, goals, and purposes of a study guide and inform the choices researchers make. Thus, while criticality, reflexivity, collaboration, and rigor are important to all aspects of qualitative research, we acknowledge that the kind of research topics and goals that researchers have shape the degree to which they engage these ideals in the actual research design, implementation, analysis, and written reports. Furthermore, to engage in qualitative research that is critical, reflexive, collaborative, and rigorous involves intentional engagement throughout the research, which we discuss throughout the book. We operationally define and describe these horizontal values in the sections that follow.

Criticality

We believe that criticality is central to conducting valid, ethical qualitative research. The word *critical* has a range of meanings, both broadly in academia and

specifically in relation to qualitative research.⁵ Our conception of criticality in qualitative research aligns with critical social theory⁶ and extends into methodological processes.

We conceptualize criticality in qualitative research as necessarily including a number of key characteristics, including that it (a) identifies and interrogates **hegemony**, dominance, and power asymmetries; (b) denormalizes hegemonic dominant narratives, social norms, social constructions, and assumptions; (c) works to address issues of intersectional discrimination and oppression with respect to race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, and other identity markers in and beyond the research; (d) actively resists reinscribing deficit orientations, essentialism, and pathologization of marginalized communities, instead viewing these as extensions of White dominance, patriarchy, and colonialism; and (e) requires that researchers engage in critical reflexivity on self as a researcher. Addressing methodological issues of power and inequity, which includes a focus on impositions of social hierarchy and issues of structural inequity in the context of research and in the research process itself, is central to taking a stance of criticality in qualitative research (Cannella & Lincoln, 2012; Paris & Winn, 2014; L. T. Smith, 2012; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). Criticality in qualitative research centralizes a methodological approach to research that helps researchers see, engage, contextualize, and make meaning of the complexity of people's lives, society, and the social, political, institutional, and economic forces that shape and delimit them. This includes maintaining fidelity to people's complicated experiences, identifying and resisting hegemonic hierarchy and power asymmetries, working against binaries and deficit thinking,⁷ and engaging methodological processes that consider these issues intentionally through systematic self-reflection (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2018; Chilisa, 2012; Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998).

Criticality in qualitative research is cultivated through taking an inquiry stance that foregrounds issues of hegemony, inequity, and identity, and works to co-create the conditions for research that is antihegemonic (i.e., antiracist, anticolonialist) in its approach to power inherent in research processes, research settings, and society more broadly. This entails that researchers cultivate understandings of the active role of reflection in research. An inquiry stance on research translates into more person-centered, systematic, and proactive approaches to understanding people in context (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001, 2009; Ravitch, 2006a, 2006b, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2019). For example, a researcher may critique the epistemological dominance of formal theories, conceptual and contextual understandings of everyday life and social arrangements, and methodological processes and methods choices. This practice of research seeks to resist the current confines, norms, and challenges of research—and the contexts in which it is carried out. A goal of criticality in qualitative research is to develop counternarratives to dominant cultural knowledge and normative narratives that circulate in everyday life. In more critical kinds of research, researchers must work to position themselves as learners, with humility, and must assertively challenge their interpretive authority, biases, and assumptions at every research turn through dialogical engagement and structured reflexivity. Throughout the book, we discuss how researchers can cultivate and engage in specific methodological processes to engage criticality in qualitative research.

This term is often used in relation to qualitative research design to signify that qualitative research does not strictly adhere to a fixed design. Based on multiple factors in the field, qualitative research can evolve and change. Researchers refine and revise research questions, data collection methods, and other aspects of a qualitative study to respond to the realities of fieldwork in a specific context. Qualitative researchers also use the term *emergent* to mean aspects or understandings that arise from data, as in emergent learning or emergent theories.

In qualitative research, binaries refer to dichotomies such as polarizing notions of insider or outsider positionality, practitioner or scholar, Black or White, male or female gender categories, and so on. Binaries reduce complexity and impose an either/or frame on people's lived experiences, which are multifaceted, layered, and intersectional. Binaries oversimplify human realities, which are lived in ways that are dynamic, individualized, and more consonant with a both/and paradigm.

Reflexivity is the systematic assessment of your identity, positionality, and subjectivities as a person and as a researcher. Researcher reflexivity refers to an ongoing awareness and active address of a researcher's role and influence in the development and

implementation of research processes and findings. Methodologically, this entails commitment to intentional self-reflection of biases, theoretical preferences, research settings, selection of participants, personal experiences, relationships with participants, the data generated, and analytical interpretations.

Qualitative research is often described as iterative, signifying that it (a) involves a back-and-forth of interactive processes and (b) changes and evolves over time as you engage in these interactive processes. Ideally, these back-and-forth processes lead to a progressive, evolutionary refinement of research at conceptual, theoretical, and methodological levels.

The concept of hegemony, developed by scholar and activist Antonio Gramsci, refers to the social, cultural, ideological, and economic influence imposed by dominant groups in society. The dissemination of dominant ideologies is enacted and maintained through ideological, social, cultural, and institutional means in such a way that dominant ideas, values, and beliefs appear to be "normal" and neutral because "the ideas, values, and experiences of dominant groups are validated in public discourse" and represented in public processes and structures, including education, politics, law, and social institutions (Lears, 1985, p. 574).

Reflexivity

A central aspect in qualitative research is researcher reflexivity. Broadly, researcher reflexivity is the systematic assessment of your identity, positionality, biases, assumptions, values, and subjectivities. Researcher reflexivity requires an active and ongoing commitment to the work of becoming aware of and addressing your role as a researcher and therefore your powerful influence on the development and enactment of your research process and findings. Methodologically, researcher reflexivity entails active self-reflection on your theoretical preferences, biases about research settings, biases about the selection of participants, reflection on how your personal experiences affect your research in terms of your relationships with research participants, the data generated,

and your analytical interpretations. Reflexivity, then, requires you to be vigilant and to frequently reassess your positionality, social identity, and related subjectivities both broadly and in terms of how they influence the research.

Considering that the researcher is the primary instrument of qualitative research (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006; Porter, 2010) and therefore the importance of systematically considering and methodologically addressing social identity and positionality, it is clear that the researcher's values and epistemologies are vitally important to the research design, implementation, and findings of any study (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). Related to this, the researcher's beliefs, socialization experiences, and understandings of concepts and experiences (e.g., emotion, culture, schooling, social engagement) might seem neutral but are actually subjective, political, and value laden.

Given that qualitative research is focused on an appreciation of subjectivity and interpretation, understanding personal subjectivities is of vital importance. Acknowledging our subjectivities as researchers, which some refer to as a *disciplined subjectivity* (Erickson, 1973; LeCompte & Goets, 1982), is central to rigorous and valid research. Researcher reflexivity requires systematic attention to your subjectivity and biases. It is your responsibility, as the researcher, to understand the nature of those subjectivities as they relate to research design and processes.

Throughout the book, we discuss the inextricable connection between methods and findings in qualitative inquiry, but it is important to underscore that, as with all research, you as a qualitative researcher shape research in ways that reflect your values and assumptions about the world. This, in turn, shapes how studies are designed, how data are collected, how such data are interpreted and analyzed, and therefore what you represent in research products. For this reason, careful attention to who you are; what you think of and assume about yourself, other people, and the world; and how you view the role of research in understanding human *being* is vital to rigorous, valid research. The way you approach engaging in critical reflection about all of these aspects of who you are and how that figures into and shapes myriad aspects of your research is central to researcher reflexivity. And it is this researcher reflexivity that helps to support rigorous, honest, ethical research.

Collaboration

In addition to adopting a systematic practice of researcher reflexivity, engaging in systematic collaboration is vital to quality research. Collaboration can be engaged with participants, colleagues, advisers, peers, and mentors in deliberate ways that support conducting valid, ethical qualitative research. Given its central role in bringing into conversation (and even into generative tension) a range of perspectives toward diversifying knowledge and perspective, collaboration is the third value of qualitative research. There are many possibilities for what collaboration can look like in qualitative research. Regardless of whether you are a solo researcher, a member of a research team, or involved in a participatory study that is co-constructed with participants, collaboration is necessary throughout all stages of the research process. And further, understanding collaboration critically is key. By this we mean that collaboration, while seemingly positive or neutral, can invite all sorts of confusions and tensions that it is best to consider prior to (and then throughout) your research process. Some more prevalent issues that emerge with respect to collaboration are competing priorities; conflicting ideologies; divergent views on research design and

This refers to the collaborative, dialogue-based processes that qualitative researchers engage in throughout a research study. These processes focus on pushing yourself to think about various aspects of the research process (and products) through talking about them with strategically selected individuals

(thought partners). Thought partners are people who can challenge you to see yourself and your research from multiple perspectives. These people include colleagues, advisers, peers, research team members, inquiry group members, and/or research participants.

process; issues with balancing priorities, needs, and values; navigating multiple sets of advice and feedback when dialogic engagement partners and collaborators differ in how they interpret and make meaning of research processes and products (and perhaps when they have differing levels of power and insight); and, in group or team research, building agreement or consensus around research priorities and processes.

Ideally, given the value of honoring and engaging multiple subjectivities, as well as the need to challenge oneself through engagement with multiple points of view, qualitative research should not be understood or approached as an isolated endeavor but, rather, as an endeavor that, in its very nature, requires collaboration. We understand that research is not always structured in ways that make or even allow for collaboration as an integral part of the research. We suggest that researchers place a priority on building collaboration into the early research stages such as question development and then into research designs. Thus, we argue for an active kind of collaborative stance that systematically invites multiple opportunities for **dialogic engagement** to help foster rigorous and reflexive research as well as criticality in qualitative research (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984; Lillis, 2003; Rule, 2011; Tanggaard, 2009). Dialogic engagement processes allow you to co-create the conditions of collaboration by deliberately engaging thought partners, critical friends, and/or research participants to challenge your biases and interpretations.⁸ In subsequent chapters, we discuss dialogic engagement as a necessary component of qualitative research and suggest specific ways to collaboratively engage with participants, colleagues, advisers, and mentors in and throughout the research process. The book helps you map dialogic engagement practices onto every stage of the research process so that you create a research design that relies on intentional, critical collaboration as a core validity strategy. We also highlight ways to think about, document, and engage in dialogic engagement that relate to some of its possibilities and challenges.

Rigor

To study individuals' lived experiences and understand them in complex, dynamic, nuanced, and contextualized ways requires faithful attention to methodological rigor. Rigor in qualitative research refers to overall research quality and validity. To this end, achieving rigor in qualitative research encompasses a variety of concepts, methods, considerations, and actions, including the following:

- Develop and enact a research design that seeks complexity and contextualization through its scope and structure, choice and strategic sequencing of methods, and alignment of research methods with research questions and inquiry processes.
- Maintain fidelity to participants' experiences and voices through engaging in inductive and emergent research that is actively responsive to emerging meanings, situations, and realities while at the same time supports a systematic approach to data collection and analysis.
- Understand and represent as complex, contextualized, textured, and respectful a picture of people, contexts, events, and experiences as possible.
- Transparently address the processes, challenges, and limitations of a study, including validity issues raised by the role of the researcher and issues of power and systemic discrimination.

As we discuss throughout the book, engaging in rigorous qualitative research entails designing a study that is responsive not only to the research questions and goals but also to the participants and emerging learnings throughout the research. It is as much about strategic and appropriate research design as it is about intentionality and vigor in research implementation.

An additional way that rigor is achieved in qualitative studies is through the reflexive engagement processes described above (i.e., researcher reflexivity and dialogic engagement). Achieving rigor in this manner includes systematic attention to your views, assumptions, and biases and how they shape all aspects and stages of your research. This engagement leads qualitative researchers to an understanding of the subjectivity of individual experience and of intergroup variability (differences across cultural and social groups) and intragroup variability (cultural differences within social groups; Erickson, 2004; Ravitch 2006a, 2006b). Interrupting normative approaches to research that are typically steeped in oversimplified thinking about culture is an important aspect of conducting rigorous qualitative research that resists essentializing (and therefore denying individuality to) individuals. Furthermore, rigor involves paying careful attention throughout the research process to context and complexity; without this attention, qualitative research can reinscribe reductionist, essentializing, disrespectful, and unethical interpretations and representations of people's experiences and lives.

We discuss rigor throughout the book, but specifically in Chapter 3, which focuses on research design, and Chapter 6, which focuses on validity in qualitative research.

APPROACHES TO QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: AN OVERVIEW

One goal of this introductory text is to orient you to the qualitative research paradigm. Part of that goal includes describing the specific approaches within the qualitative paradigm. The choice of methodological approach is primarily guided by the study's research

questions and aims; it also stems from various contextual influences, the researcher's epistemological beliefs, and existing theory and research. Thus, the methodological approach is part of the conceptual framework of a study (described in depth in Chapter 2) and varies since some researchers work *from* an approach and others arrive *at* an approach. There are a multitude of approaches to qualitative research; in this section, we briefly define some of the commonly used approaches and refer you to different texts for additional discussion of approaches.⁹

There are more approaches to qualitative research than chapters in this book, but here we briefly define 10 main ones: action research, case study research, ethnography and critical ethnography, evaluation research, grounded theory, narrative research/inquiry, participatory action research, phenomenology, and practitioner research. We focus on these since they are the more common of the specific approaches to qualitative research, and therefore our students typically need to be familiar with these approaches to consider their options and develop their methodological approaches for their research topics. We do not review these in depth since that is beyond the scope of this book but rather provide overview in Table 1.2. We also provide additional reading resources at the end of the chapter and continue the discussion of the different approaches in our data collection and analysis chapters.

Before providing overviews to these 10 approaches, it is important to note that the majority of qualitative research studies, in terms of approach, remain unnamed/unspecified and are referred to as “general qualitative research.” Since many qualitative studies do not situate themselves within a specific approach and since even when using different approaches much is shared across qualitative approaches, this book describes qualitative research in general rather than within specific approaches. It is also important to note that in addition to these approaches, there are multiple interpretive frameworks (sometimes referred to as approaches) including (but not limited to) feminist theory, hermeneutics, critical race theory, anti- and postcolonial theory, queer theory, disability theory, Black feminist epistemology, poststructuralism, and critical realist theories. While we do not go into detail on these here because this is beyond the scope of this book, we refer you to several helpful sources on these frameworks and approaches, including *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), *Critical Qualitative Research Reader* (Steinberg & Cannella, 2012), *White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology* (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008), and *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To be clear, there are many more qualitative approaches than those defined in Table 1.2, but in an effort not to overwhelm and to provide working definitions of the most commonly used approaches, we have summarized these approaches. Examples of other approaches include appreciative inquiry, autoethnography, indigenous research methodologies, portraiture, teacher research, and many of the approaches listed here that have more “critical” forms of the approach.

These approaches are important to carefully consider because they have ideological, conceptual, and methodological implications. It is important to note that, at times, people can combine these approaches, for example, engaging in a case study that employs participatory methods or using ethnographic methods to inform the

Table 1.2 Approaches to Qualitative Research

Action research	<p>Action research involves a contextual and organizational approach to problem solving through data collection and analysis that can be conducted by a group of practitioners and/or led by a professional research facilitator. Because the problems or topics that action research addresses derive from the lived experiences of everyday life, theory and practice are viewed as integral parts of the research process. Action research is a systematic approach to empirical investigation that enables people, as applied researchers, to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives.</p> <p>Action research involves cycles that include processes of planning, action, observation, and reflection. By definition, action research takes place in natural settings in that it includes attempts to solve real-world problems. There are many forms of action research, including participatory action research (also defined in this table) and practitioner action research. Action research can also be used in some forms of evaluation research. In general, action research involves collaborative and democratic process through which researchers are co-inquirers who take shared responsibility for the overall research endeavor—from the development of research questions through data collection and analysis processes, and in reporting—and who share a goal of applying insights gained through systematic research to the contexts and issues at the heart of the investigation. Action research studies or projects can use both qualitative and quantitative methods in a range of ways.</p>
Case study research	<p>Case study research¹⁰ methods involve studying a case—or multiple cases—in significant depth and in its real-world context(s). Case study research methods tend to employ a variety of data sources, including direct observations, interviews, focus groups, documents, artifacts, and other sources. As such, case study research is not exclusive to qualitative research methods.¹¹ Researchers may choose to engage in case study research when their research questions are framed as <i>how</i> or <i>why</i> questions particular to a specific setting (Yin, 2018).</p> <p>According to Yin (2018), case study research is a <i>mode</i> of inquiry, whereas case studies are a <i>method</i> of inquiry and cases are a <i>unit</i> of inquiry. Not to be confused with <i>popular case studies</i> or <i>teaching-practice case studies</i>, <i>research case studies</i> seek "to understand a 'case'—what it is, how it works, and how it interacts with its real-world contextual environment" (Yin, 2018, p. xxiii). A case may be a concrete entity (e.g., individual, group, organization) or less concrete entity that is bounded by time and place (e.g., relationship, community, decision-making process; Creswell & Poth, 2018).</p> <p>Case study research designs vary in terms of how many cases they examine (i.e., single- or multiple-case studies), what type of data they include (i.e., qualitative, quantitative, or both), how they position the case studies (i.e., stand-alone or embedded within a larger study), and what their underlying purpose is (i.e., exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive; Yin, 2018).</p> <p>Case study research is useful for making <i>analytic generalizations</i>, or argumentative claims that build on and nuance relevant theoretical concepts</p>

	<p>(Yin, 2018). Alternatively, case study research may generate new theories through a process in which findings are “extended from one case to the next and more and more data are collected and analyzed. This form of reiteration and continuous refinement, more commonly referred to as the multiple case study, occurs over an extended period of time” (Dooley, 2002, p. 336).¹²</p>
Ethnography and critical ethnography	<p>Ethnography places an emphasis on in-person field study in which a researcher spends significant time in a setting with participants (referred to as immersion) to decipher embedded cultural meanings and generate rich, descriptive data that emerge through (1) in-depth relationships developed with participants, (2) multiple data sources that necessarily include participant observation, and (3) writing detailed observational fieldnotes. Participant observation is considered the primary method of ethnography and involves direct observation and fieldnotes, informal interviews, participation in group activities, prolonged immersion in a setting, identification and review of relevant sources of information including documents and artifacts, engagement in discussions, and so forth. Quantitative data, although typically not a primary data source, can be used along with the qualitative data generated by ethnographic studies.</p> <p>While ethnographic data collection is a primarily descriptive process, it is important to keep in mind that observation is theory-laden as a result; ethnographers interrogate and articulate the ways in which theory informs their research. Ethnography stems from anthropology and has a complex history; it is diverse and variable and even contested in terms of its definition and what constitutes immersion, culture, and participant observation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). There are multiple forms of ethnography, including holistic, semiotic, and critical. We described ethnography broadly above and also highlight critical ethnography here because these are the two broadest and most common approaches in the field of ethnography.</p> <p>Critical ethnography is based on an active critique of and resistance to normative research (including normative qualitative research) and of representations and instantiations of hegemony and oppression in institutions, communities, peoples, and society more broadly. While critical ethnography shares methods of data collection and analysis with more traditional forms of ethnography, its guiding ideology and attendant methodology, as well as its goals and processes, differ. <i>Critical ethnography</i>, which is related yet a departure from ethnography,</p> <p>aim[s] to criticize the taken-for-granted social, economic, cultural, and political assumptions and concepts . . . of Western, liberal, middle-class, industrialist, capitalist societies. Critical ethnographies are focused, theorized studies of specific social institutions or practices that aim to change awareness and/or life itself. . . . While difficult to characterize in terms of a single set of features, critical ethnographies in the main are marked by several shared dispositions: a disavowal of the model of ethnographer as detached, neutral participant observer; a focus on specific</p>

(Continued)

Table 1.2 (Continued)

	<p>practices and institutions more so than holistic portraits of an entire culture; an emancipatory versus a solely descriptive intent; and a self-referential form of reflexivity that aims to criticize the ethnographer's own production of an account. (Schwandt, 2015, pp. 47–48)</p> <p>A primary goal and value of critical ethnography is the transformation of the very realities and conditions that are at the heart of the social inquiry.</p>
Evaluation research	<p>Evaluation research, broadly, includes “any effort to judge or enhance human effectiveness through systematic data-based inquiry” (Patton, 2015, p. 18). Evaluation research is used to support and provide contextualized parameters for accountability in programs and initiatives, to analyze and learn from them in specific areas related to stated objectives and indicators, and to facilitate improvement, resource allocation, and advocacy.</p> <p>Evaluation research can be quantitative and/or qualitative; the goal of qualitative data in evaluation research is to create greater understanding and to contextualize and humanize statistics and numbers. Qualitative research methods can contribute to multiple kinds of evaluations, including program evaluation, which focuses on the processes and outcomes of a program, and quality assurance, which focuses on how processes and outcomes affect individuals (Patton, 2015).</p> <p>The criteria used in evaluation research depend on the specific type of evaluation being conducted. For example, in a program evaluation, evaluators may consider the expressed goals of the program, historical data, and a variety of other factors.¹³ In addition, in goal-free evaluation, researchers deliberately avoid studying the expressed goals of the program and instead focus on the effects and outcomes of participants' needs (Patton, 2015). Not only can evaluation research methods include quantitative and qualitative methods, but researchers may employ a variety of qualitative approaches such as phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and action research to conduct an evaluation.¹⁴ Despite the different kinds of evaluation research,¹⁵ researchers need not follow strict methodological guidelines as the context greatly influences the type of research that will be conducted.</p>
Grounded theory research	<p>Grounded theory is an approach to qualitative research that attempts to develop theory that comes from data or the field. Typically, the unit of analysis for grounded theory research is “a process or an action that has distinct steps or phases that occur over time. . . . A process might be ‘developing a general education program’ or the process of ‘supporting faculty to become good researchers’” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 83). It is important to note that grounded theory is often commonly used to refer to any approach that develops theory (concepts, models, ideas) from data. The process of developing ideas directly from data is also referred to as an inductive analytical approach. However, it is important to note that grounded theory methodology¹⁶ involves specific, rigorous</p>

	<p>procedures for analyzing qualitative data to produce formal, substantive theory of social phenomena. . . . [It] requires a concept-indicator model of analysis that, in turn, employs the method of constant comparison. Empirical indicators from the data (actions and events observed, recorded, or described in documents in the words of interviewees and respondents) are compared looking for similarities and differences. From this process, the analyst identifies underlying uniformities in the indicators and processes a coded category or concept. Concepts are compared with more empirical indicators and with each other to sharpen the definition of the concept and to define its properties. Theories are formed from proposing plausible relationships among concepts and sets of concepts. Tentative theories or theoretical propositions are further explored through additional instances of data. The testing of the emergent theory is guided by theoretical sampling. (Schwandt, 2015, pp. 62–63)</p> <p>Data for grounded theory studies can come from a variety of sources such as interviews, observations, documents, and other sources. Important to grounded theory is the premise that data analysis begins as soon as the first piece of data is collected (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2015). As we assert the importance of memoing throughout the book, it is also an especially important analytical tool throughout all aspects of grounded theory research studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018).</p>
Narrative research/ inquiry	<p>Narrative research “examines human lives through the lens of a narrative, honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge” (Patton, 2015, p. 128). Narrative research typically includes a focus on “one or two individuals, gathering data through the collection of their stories, reporting individual experiences, and chronologically ordering the meaning of those experiences (or using life course stages)” (Creswell, 2013, p. 70).</p> <p>Narrative research methodologically gives primacy to the lived experiences of individuals as expressed in their stories. This is because “humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2), and individuals construct reality through the narration of their stories.</p> <p>There are several different types of narrative research; two ways to differentiate narrative inquiry are (1) looking at the data analysis strategy narrative researchers use and (2) considering the different types of narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 69). A narrative data analysis strategy involves recognizing that narrative and story are not equivalent; rather, narrative is the analysis of stories, which comprise the data set (Patton, 2015). Narrative researchers can analyze data thematically, or according to the themes emerging from participants’ stories; structurally, or with respect to the ways in which the stories are told; or dialogically, focusing on how the stories are produced and performed (e.g., independently or collaboratively; Riessman, 2008). The process of reorganizing participants’ stories is known as restorying. When considering the different types of narrative, these tend to include biographical study, autoethnography, life history, and oral history (J.-H. Kim, 2016).</p>

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Table 1.2 (Continued)

	<p>Narrative researchers can draw from multiple data sources, such as interviews, observations, documents (e.g., journal entries, memoirs), and pictures. Narrative researchers also attend to the multiple contexts (i.e., sociocultural, historical, political, linguistic, and physical) in which stories are embedded (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, narrative research techniques can be used in conjunction with other qualitative approaches, such as in-depth interviews.</p>
Participatory action research	<p><i>Participatory action research</i> (PAR) is an umbrella term for a variety of participatory approaches to action-oriented research that focuses on challenging hierarchical and asymmetrical relationships between research and action as well as between researchers and members of minoritized, marginalized, and exploited communities and groups. PAR involves working collaboratively with groups, communities, and people that experience the effects of hegemony through forms of social control, oppression, or colonization. PAR holds as its central value the democratization of knowledge and an intentional stance against the reinscription of oppression within its processes and methods. PAR is distinguished from other research according to three primary characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) its participatory character—cooperation and collaboration between the researcher(s) and other participants in problem definition, choice of methods, data analysis, and use of findings . . . ; (2) its democratic impulse—PAR embodies democratic ideals or principles but it is not necessarily a recipe for bringing about democratic change; (3) its objective of producing both useful knowledge and action as well as consciousness raising—empowering people through the process of constructing and using their own knowledge. PAR is also marked by tension surrounding the simultaneous realization of the aims of participant involvement, social improvement, and knowledge production. (Schwandt, 2015, p. 229) <p>PAR, at its core, is about local knowledge generation and dissemination toward the accomplishment of stakeholder-driven goals for change and transformation. PAR reflects a belief that people can work toward their own liberation through co-creating the conditions for shared critical engagement, learning, and transformative action in the world. This approach has been shaped and informed by Paulo Freire's (1970/2000) seminal <i>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</i>.</p> <p>Youth participatory action research applies the tenets of PAR specifically to work with young people. This is an emerging subfield with important implications for the development of youth agency.</p>
Phenomenology	<p>Phenomenology is considered both a research method and a philosophy and is largely attributed to the philosophy of Edmund Husserl. Researchers employing phenomenological research methods tend to be interested in individuals' lived experiences of a phenomenon (e.g., homeless parenting, crisis leadership). A phenomenon does not need to be bound by space and</p>