Negotiating the Complexities of Qualitative Research In Higher Education

Fundamental Elements and Issues

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SITUATING THE RESEARCH: FIRST STEPS

Many beginnings are precarious. "The problem of the beginning is, in fact, the problem of the end. For it is with respect to an end that a beginning is defined" (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 472). How does a researcher negotiate the precariousness of beginning a study? How does one arrive at a completed, worthy qualitative study? We believe it is imperative that those who engage in qualitative inquiry address its fundamental and complex defining features. These features include situating the research in a grounding perspective; being congruent in the research design and in how one selects, interprets, and represents participants; making choices and managing the consequences of mixing methods; and, of course, meeting obligations of ethics and goodness (i.e., criteria for determining a worthy, well-designed, and well-implemented study). Negotiating these complex features determines the quality and worthiness of the research study, yet these features in particular are often overlooked by many researchers who attempt to conduct qualitative studies.

We begin this discussion by exploring the fundamental considerations of situating research. To situate a study means to "anchor" it (Jones, 2002, p. 463). This is a process that identifies a series of choices

that include deciding upon an area of interest, a grounding perspective or worldview, a theoretical framework and perspective, a question, a purpose (e.g., research, assessment, or evaluation), and a relationship with the topic and participants. Studies that are not situated or anchored run adrift, ramble, become lost, and are without direction. In this chapter, the immediate considerations for negotiating necessary decisions to situate a study are explored and corresponding examples are offered, including the decision making of a fictitious researcher, "Michael," as he situates his study.

CONSIDERATION 1: SITUATING THE STUDY WITHIN A COMPELLING INTEREST

One of the first considerations in situating a study is to reflect upon what issue or topic is sufficiently compelling that causes "me" to want to contemplate more about it. What is it that presses upon me in a way that necessitates I understand it more? What unknown deters my practice, my community, my society?

The intent of qualitative research is to illuminate and better understand in depth the rich lives of human beings and the world in which we live. Hence, one's compelling interest must reflect this depth. Thoroughness and explicitness should be balanced with what Marshall and Rossman (1999) called the "do-ability" of a study (p. 9), or the feasibility that a study can be completed considering the resources available, purpose, and researcher competence.

Compelling interests that lead to unsettled questions are typically related to our life experiences. This is not to be avoided. Marshall and Rossman (1999) referred to this as the "want-to-do-ability" of a study (p. 10), and it is directly related to one of the central features of qualitative research, the researcher-as-instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Patton, 2002). Qualitative inquiry requires the researcher to become embedded in context and responsive to what is happening in that context. There often is, and should be, a relationship between the researcher and the researched. This reflects the passion that later becomes the research question. Critics of qualitative research often refer to this relationship as bias. The three of us believe this to be a strength of qualitative inquiry. We will address this criticism in depth later in this chapter and in subsequent chapters.

Let's look at an example. In one of his graduate classes, Michael studies campus environments. His reading assignments offer insight into his own experiences of being physically threatened and feeling unwelcome on campus. He finds that this literature supports and validates

his feelings and experiences that safety is a broader notion than physical safety. In a subsequent class on research design, Michael feels compelled to study student safety on campus. Before deciding upon a particular question or its wording, however, Michael has much to think about, including his worldview about the generation of knowledge.

This brings us to consideration 2, and the question of how one's worldview about knowledge influences research decisions.

CONSIDERATION 2: SITUATING THE STUDY WITHIN THE RESEARCHER'S WORLDVIEW

Researchers often err in deciding upon a research question prematurely. Researchers must first consider their view about how knowledge is generated and the nature of reality. Jones (2002) noted that conducting qualitative research is both a blessing and a burden. Certainly the enrichment that researchers gain from the research process is one of the blessings, and, as Jones noted, researchers' responsibilities to those with whom they come into contact are significant. The "burden" comes in the need to understand the complexity of philosophy and theory upon which qualitative research and its associated traditions are founded. Negotiating these complexities may at times be burdensome. We encourage researchers to "lean" into these complexities. In fact, avoiding them would be irresponsible. Yet, this "leaning into" takes considerable study. Thelin (2003) noted the historical utilitarian and pragmatic aspects emphasized in American higher education. We believe these aspects continue to influence higher education through the reluctance of some practitioners and administrators to use theory to guide educational practice. Qualitative research is guided and influenced by theory. To engage in qualitative research is to pay attention to philosophy and theory. What differentiates this book from others, not particular to education, is that we assist the pragmatic user in negotiating the complexities of philosophy and theory for results that will be used in pragmatic ways. We begin by discussing worldview and what we believe are aspects of worldview including philosophy, epistemology, ontology, and theory.

One's worldview, or how a person perceives his or her relation to the world, is associated with one's culture and upbringing (Sue, Ivey, & Pedersen, 1996). Obviously one's worldview can be altered and matures through life experiences, but it also can house consistent values and concepts. It shapes one's philosophical grounding. In this book, we refer to *philosophy* as a system of fundamental principles that serve as a basis for action (Berube, 1995). Philosophy, the study and search for wisdom,

is described as including the elements of logic, epistemology, ontology, ethics, and metaphysics (Brightman, 1964; Durant, 1961; Honderich, 1995). *Metaphysics* at one time referred to the study of the ultimate reality of all things including the study of existence (ontology) and the study of the nature of knowledge (epistemology). However, Heidegger (1926/1962) contested the notion of an ultimate reality of all things, a grand objective narrative, or representative understanding (Bronner, 1999). Heidegger wrote, "We do not know what 'Being' means. But even if we ask, 'What is Being'?, we keep within an understanding of the 'is,' though we are unable to fix conceptually what 'is' signifies" (p. 25). He stressed the necessity to "bring forward the entities themselves" (Heidegger, 1926/1962, p. 61).

One's worldview on the nature of existence and knowledge has implications for how one will embark upon a study. For example, believing that existence is an ultimate reality and knowledge a grand narrative, believing that existence is difficult to understand and that existence calls to itself rather than is represented, or believing other notions of existence and reality are important considerations in situating a study. "Ways of knowing are inherently culture-bound" (Lather, 1991, p. 2). Consider the traditional Russian wooden doll, where one very small doll is embedded within a small doll, which is embedded in a medium-sized doll, which is embedded in a larger doll; how data are analyzed and the ways in which data are collected are determined by a particular methodology, which is situated within a philosophical (that is, epistemological and ontological) stance. Often, this is referred to as the researcher's *theoretical perspective*.

Table 1.1 is an exercise to assist you in better understanding your epistemological and ontological worldview. It describes a series of belief statements listed in three columns. Circle those statements under the columns *A*, *B*, and *C* that are most consistent with your own views of knowledge and reality.

Is there a preponderance of circles in any one column? These statements indicate aspects of worldview that will influence views on research. There is also an activity at the end of this chapter that may help you identify philosophical differences and their influence on scholarship in higher education. Each column in Table 1.1 depicts a different view of knowledge and existence. We have depicted three views here, as have other scholars including Coomer and Hultgren (1989). However, Sipe and Constable (1996) noted four "vantage points or places to stand" (p. 162), and Lincoln and Guba (2000) indicated that four paradigmatic positions exist. Welcome to the complexities of qualitative research! Clearly, views of knowledge grounding research are dynamic and not to

Table 1.1 Worldview Exercise

A	B	C
Reality is a physical and observable event.	Reality is constructed through local human interaction.	Reality is shaped by social, political, economic, and other values crystallized over time.
The aim of research is to predict and explain, generalizing results.	The aim of research is increased understanding of complex human phenomena to alter existing power relations.	The aim of research is transformation and emancipation to promote a humanity capable of controlling its destiny.
Truth is universal and verifiable; findings are considered true.	Truth is an agreement between members of a stakeholding community.	Truth is influenced by history and societal structures.
The researcher can and should be objective.	Objectivity is impossible; rather, the researcher serves as an avenue for the representation of multiple voices.	The view of objectivity as a goal is harmful; rather, advocacy is the aim of research.
Good research is value free.	Values are a means of understanding.	Values are formative.
Researchers study a problem.	Researchers live a question with participants.	Researchers transform with a community by imagining and helping to create alternatives.
It is through the voice and jurisdiction of an expert that knowledge is gained.	It is through voices and acknowledgment of both participants and a researcher that knowledge is gained.	It is through theoretical perspectives of societal structures in conjunction with the people who are most affected that knowledge is gained.
The universe is human centered.		
History is progress.		

Source: Bronner (1999), Crotty (1998), Lincoln and Guba (2000), Maykut and Morehouse (2001), and Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (1995).

seen as discrete categories mutually exclusive of each other (Crotty, '8). It is beyond the scope of this book to delineate the intricate dif-ences of all the views on knowledge and existence. The point to take ıy is that these views bring with them assumptions that influence earch questions, the purpose of research, and the interpretation of earch findings.

Statements in column A are descriptive of views that knowledge l reality are universal and measurable. Terms associated with these ws include *positivism* and *postpositivism* (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln & ba, 2000), *empiricism* (Smith, 1993), *empirical/analytical* (Coomer & ltgren, 1989), and *objectivism* (Crotty, 1998), with an emphasis on diction. In column B, knowledge and existence are perceived and ıstructed through human interaction and emphasize understanding. e views represented in column B are often associated with the terms *rpretive* (Coomer & Hultgren), *constructivism* (Lincoln & Guba, 10), and *constructionism* (Crotty, 1998). Column C depicts the pur-ıe of knowledge as emancipation; meaning of the phenomenon of the dy is imposed, imported, or translated by the subject (Crotty). Terms ociated with these views include *subjectivism* (Crotty) or *subjectiv-* (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) and *critical science* (Coomer & Hultgren). perienced researchers will notice the absence of a column or columns traying postmodernism, poststructuralism, and deconstruction. h a clearly laid-out structure seemed at odds with the main tenets of se perspectives, so they are not represented here but will be discussed r in the chapter. We will return to a more in-depth discussion of se terms later. First, let's turn to the terms *qualitative* and *quantitative* l the worldviews they represent.

The statements in columns B and C are indicative of what is still nmonly referred to as *qualitative research* or the *qualitative para-m*. Crotty (1998) described the polar opposition of these terms as "great divide" (p. 14). Since the 1980s some researchers have been ving away from these bipolar terms. Our dilemma here is whether ıse terms that novices will recognize or to use contemporary terms. will use the familiar terms, while encouraging the study and under-ıding of more current ones. The terms that one uses when referring cnowledge creation are themselves indicative of a worldview, a multi-ıensional one or one that can be simplified by two broad categories. liscussion on how the broad polarities of quantitative and qualitative earch emerged will be helpful.

Thomas Kuhn (1970) used the Greek term *paradeigma*, meaning tern or model, to refer to basic patterns that scientists use to inter-t data. In this context, he defined *paradigm* as a model "from which

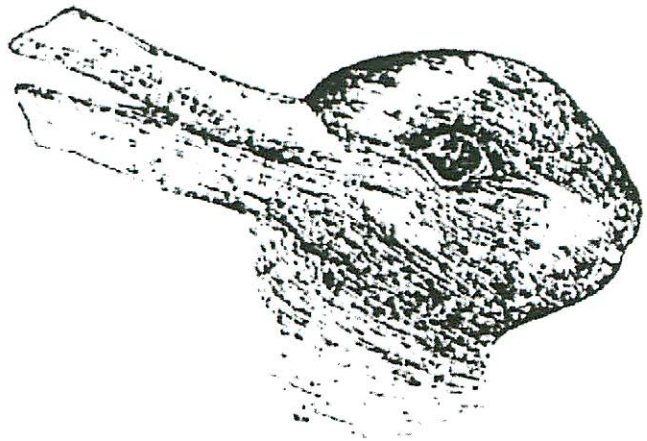


Figure 1.1

spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research" (p. 10). He went on to write, "In short, consciously or not, the decision to employ a particular piece of apparatus and to use it in a particular way carries an assumption that only certain sorts of circumstance will arise" (p. 59). He offered a number of examples of scientists whose work was ignored by the established scientific community restricting new understanding. Such scientists have included Copernicus, Galileo, Isaac Newton, and Albert Einstein. According to Kuhn, Copernicus did not discover more data, but rather he was able to imagine how the data might fit into a different pattern. Kuhn employed Joseph Jastrow's famous duck–rabbit picture* as a metaphor of the paradigm shift debate. He concluded that once the viewer has "seen" the new paradigm (or duck–rabbit), it is impossible to forget it. This opened the possibility of asking, "What would data look like from another perspective?" "What might the universe look like from the perspective of the sun rather than the earth?" and "What new insights can be offered by collecting data from a position of an 'emic,' or insider's view rather than the view of the authority observer?"

Through calling attention to the different ways of collecting and viewing data, the concept of a knowledge paradigm has created an overly simplistic distinction between new paradigm and old paradigm, between rational and mythic, and between quantitative and qualitative inquiry (Figure 1.1).

* There is some controversy as to who to credit for this drawing. Some, such as Kuhn, credit Ludwig Wittgenstein (*Philosophical Investigations*, 1953), but Wittgenstein himself credited Jastrow for the drawing published in *Harper's Weekly* in 1892.

Table 1.2 Various Definitions of Terms

Terms	Morse and Richards	Denzin and Lincoln	Crotty	Creswell	Maykut and Morehouse	Lincoln and Guba	Patton	Glesne
Paradigm	"Philosophical paradigms [include] feminism, postmodernism, and critical theory" (2002, p. 171).	The net that contains the researcher's epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises (2000, p. 19); assumptions that "represent a belief system that attaches to a particular worldview" (1994, p. 2).	"Package of beliefs" (1998, p. 35).	"[W]orldview, a basic set of beliefs or assumptions that guide their inquiries" (1998, p. 74).	A set of overarching and interconnected assumptions about the nature of reality (2001, p. 4).	Represents a distillation of what we think of the world but cannot prove; systematic set of beliefs (1985, p. 15).	A worldview, a general perspective, a way of breaking down the complexity of the world (1990, p. 37).	Refers to "modes of inquiry" (1999, p. 6); cites other authors in defining paradigm.
Epistemology	"[A]ssumptions [that] concern the origins of knowledge" (2002, p. 3).	"[H]as historically defined standards of evaluation" (1994, p. 6; 2000, p. 11); "specifies a set of questions" (2000, p. 18).	"The theory of knowledge imbedded in the theoretical and thereby in the methodology" (1998, p. 3).	"[T]he relationship of the researcher to that being researched" (1998, p. 74).	"Assumptions that concern the origins of knowledge" (2001, p. 3).			
Ontology	"[C]oncern questions about the nature of reality" (2002, p. 3).	Explains the kind of being a human being is; answers the question "What is the nature of reality?" (2000, p. 19).	"Concerned with 'what is' the nature of existence, with the structure of reality" (1998, p. 10).	"[A]ddresses the nature of reality" (1998, p. 76).	"Concerns questions about the nature of reality" (2001, p. 3).			"[N]ature of reality" (1999, p. 4).

(Continued)

Terms	Morse and Richards	Denzin and Lincoln	Crotty	Creswell	Maykut and Morehouse	Lincoln and Guba	Patton	Glesne
Theoretical Perspective		"Set of propositions that are interrelated in an ordered fashion such that some may be deducible from others thus permitting an explanation to be developed for the phenomenon under construction" (Denzin, 1988, p. 49); "The ... researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework, theory, ontology" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 18).	"The philosophical stance informing methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria" (1998, p. 3).	Provides "an explanation, a prediction, and a generalization about how the world operates" (1998, p. 84).			"What distinguishes the discussion of theory . . . on qualitative methods is the emphasis on inductive strategies of theory development in contrast to theory generated by logical deduction" (1990, p. 66).	"The ultimate goal of this form of theorizing is to develop universal laws of human behavior and societal functioning" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 19; Glesne, 1999, p. 22); differentiates low level (outcomes from previous studies) from middle range (explains a set of phenomenon) (1999, p. 22).
Literature Review	Under the heading "Using the Literature Review": "[T]heoretical context . . . places the study in the context of the topic" (2002, p. 189).						"[H]ow others have approached similar concerns" (1990, p. 163).	"Reading about the studies of others. . . . [To] collect, scan, and read literature . . . can help find focus for your topic . . . can help inform your research design" (1999, p. 20).

(Continued)

Terms	Morse and Richards	Denzin and Lincoln	Crotty	Creswell	Maykut and Morehouse	Lincoln and Guba	Patton	Glesne
Methodology	*See* method.	"[T]he specific ways questions are examined" (2000, p. 18).	"The strategy, plan of action, process, or designing behind the choice and use of particular methods" (1998, p. 3).	"[H]ow one concept-ualizes the entire research process" (1998, p. 77).				
Method	"[S]hare the goal of deriving new understanding and making theory out of data" (2002 p. 13).		"[T]he techniques or procedures used to gather and analyze data" (1998, p. 3).	"[T]he most concrete, specific part [includes] essential steps" (2003, p. 153).	Sampling strategy and the people or settings that will make up the sample, data collection procedures for data analysis (2001, p. 65).		"Permits the evaluator to study selected issues in depth and detail" (1990, p. 13).	

Table 1.3 Various Definitions of Terms

Paradigm	Epistemology	Ontology	Theoretical Perspective and Framework	Methodology	Method
A set of interconnected assumptions that distinguish between worldviews	Assumptions about the acquisition of knowledge	Assumptions about the nature of existence	Perspective: philosophical (epistemological and ontological) assumptions that guide methodology Framework: suppositions and concepts (e.g., research and theories) that inform the phenomenon under study	Informed by epistemology, ontology, and theory, a process that grounds and gives direction to study design, implementation, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation	How data are collected

em, with methodology meaning the approach that guides how data e collected and analyzed. The exclusion of methodology from the dis-ıssion of qualitative research has consequences for the worthiness of study. We believe that methodology is a central concept because it ıides the research design. Without attention paid to methodology, the searcher lacks the means to appropriately design the study, analyze .ta, and make sense of findings. In addition, the reader has no context r understanding or judging the research findings. Examples of meth-lologies include ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, life story, narrative inquiry, and case study.

In response to the various definitions of terms, Crotty (1998) fered his own representation and definitions of important qualita-'e concepts. Like Crotty, we will offer our own representation, but e we believe to be appropriate in the pragmatic context of higher ucation.

The reader will notice in Table 1.3 that we have replaced the term *erature review* with *theoretical framework* to emphasize the impor-ıce of theory. We have differentiated theoretical perspective (assump-ns about the nature of knowledge acquisition and existence) from oretical framework (concepts and previous research that inform phenomenon being studied). We have distinguished methodology hich guides research design) from method (the collection of data) ile underscoring their relationship. Understanding and using these ms allow the researcher to situate his or her study.

Let's return again to Michael's thoughts as he continues to situate his dy. Michael determines that his worldview is more consistent with interpretive and constructivist view of knowledge. He believes that mbers cannot represent the experience of feeling safe or unsafe. He ieves that an in-depth understanding about this phenomenon could t be accomplished through human interaction. As with all research-, once he has contemplated his worldview, he must now further in-tigate his epistemological and ontological stance.

Epistemology and Ontology

discussing epistemology and ontology, our aim is not to oversim-y what has occurred in the evolution of philosophy over several ıdred years. On the other hand, we don't want to burden the reader h philosophical intricacies. Rather, we seek to sufficiently describe philosophical differences so that the reader can acknowledge that stemological underpinnings do influence the researcher and his or research. What follows is a brief discussion of the primary epistemo-cal and ontological frameworks that guide inquiry.

Put very simply, what is commonly referred to as *quantitative research* is based upon objective epistemology and the linked theories of positivism, postpositivism, and empiricism (Crotty 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Smith, 1993). According to Crotty,

> Objectivism is the epistemological view that things exist as *meaningful* independently of consciousness and experience, that they have truth and meaning residing in them as objects ('objective' truth and meaning, therefore), and that careful (scientific?) research can attain that objective truth and meaning. (1998, p. 6)

Objective Positivistic Empiricism

Objective claims are true or false independent of what anyone thinks or feels about it (Honderich, 1995) such that there is a clear distinction between fact and value (Crotty, 1998). According to J. K. Smith (1993), to be objective is to detach oneself from one's own interests and depict things as they "really are" (p. 30). Knowledge is what can be found and measured outside of us. Positivism is the optimistic notion that science leads to progress (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Postpositivism adds a note of uncertainty to scientific findings challenging that observer and observed are independent (Crotty, 1998, p. 29), whereas positivism views facts as ultimate truth that comes from measurements.

Empiricism is rooted in the idea that people can neutrally observe the world through the five senses (Honderich, 1995). According to J. K. Smith (1993), empiricism is the "solution to the knowledge-versus-opinion problem" (p. 5) in that humans have the capacity to not distort observations through the controlled scientific method. Through strict procedures, claims can be made and then judged based on evidence.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and J. K. Smith (1993), the most important aspect of objective positivistic empiricism is the belief that truth is universal and can be measured through observation and discovery, proving or disproving a hypothesis. Some of the components of objective positivistic empiricism were listed in column A in the exercise in Table 1.1. Philosophers most associated with this paradigm include John Locke (Woozley, 1964), who saw the minds of humans as blank slates "devoid of any ideas" (Smith, 1993, p. 27) from which they independently existed in the world, and Max Weber (1972), who believed that researchers and scientists can make a conscious decision to exclude their judgments.

Often stated in stark contrast to the epistemological and ontological views of objectivism, constructivism (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) is also

Postmodern, poststructuralist, and deconstruction scholars attack his duality (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995). Other dualities hey oppose include fact versus fiction and myth versus reality. They also ›ppose and expose the construction of societal structures and distinctions uch as kinship, the adolescent, and the gifted (Pinar et al.). These theorists vill be discussed in greater detail later.

In situating a study within a worldview, researchers must become ware of the philosophical stances that inform their perspectives. ome beginning researchers say they embrace qualitative research vhile not truly understanding "what it is they claim to be reject- ng" or what it is they say they are embracing (Phallas, 2001, p. 10). Gaining knowledge through qualitative research has only recently ecome acceptable in research and assessment communities in the Jnited States as compared to quantitative means. Hence, most stu- ents have been schooled in quantitative study design, but few have eceived formal training in qualitative research and the philosophy iat grounds research.

As the differing views listed in Table 1.1 demonstrated, who we are s people encompasses our beliefs about the nature of reality, truth, and nowledge. These beliefs and theoretical perspectives define assump- ons about the world and subsequently about the nature of research. ezar (2004) wrote that researchers should know the philosophy of ieir worldview well enough to defend choosing it. She continued to rite that researchers should

> engage in philosophical questions, write out assumptions about the issue to be studied, investigate one's own role as researcher, consider the purpose of the research from the tradition they are working in, [and] probe what they understand as the nature of reality and how knowledge is developed. (p. 43)

What terms should researchers use to illustrate assumptions? Before nbarking further on situating one's study, it is necessary that we take a etour to discuss important terms and their definitions regarding quali- tive inquiry.

Understanding Terms Necessary in Deciding How to Situate a Study

rotty (1998) noted a lack of clarity and consistency in some of the fun- imental grounding concepts of qualitative research. He wrote,

> Research students and . . . even more seasoned campaigners— often express bewilderment at the array of methodologies and methods laid out before their gaze. . . . To add to the confusion, the terminology is far from consistent in research literature and social science texts. One frequently finds the same term in a number of different, sometimes even contradictory[,] ways. (p. 1)

To negotiate the complex fundamentals of qualitative research, we believe that it is important to be familiar with the terms *paradigm*, *epistemology*, *ontology*, *theoretical perspective*, *literature review/theoretical framework*, *methodology*, and *method*. However, these terms are sometimes defined and used differently by different scholars. Important fundamental concepts are listed in Table 1.2 along with definitions of notable research scholars. You will notice that some authors define terms similarly, some terms are defined differently, and some scholars refer to some of these concepts but not others.

Paradigm is rather consistently referred to as a set of interconnected or related assumptions or beliefs. It is also referred to as *worldview*. Related assumptions about the acquisition of knowledge are referred to as *epistemology*. Some scholars do not refer to epistemology, but those who do define it as the origins, theory, or assumptions about knowledge. Other scholars state what it is that epistemological questions illuminate, some scholars do not mention epistemology, and still others do not define epistemology in their recent works but did so in earlier works. Another set of related assumptions is associated with explanations or questions about the nature or structure of reality or existence. This is referred to as *ontology*.

Discussion about theory becomes more complicated because of its many uses. Defined as a set of interrelated explanations, theory guides a study, serves as a lens through which researchers view the world and subsequently their research, and is created from research. Glesne (1999) discussed levels of theories including substantive theories that have a low level of abstraction and provide a rationale for new studies, general theories that are used as a framework for discussing findings, and formal theory that helps form ideas during the beginning process of making meaning of data. Some scholars define theory, whereas others focus on its purpose in research or how to create theory. Still other scholars refer to theory created from previous research as informing researchers about a topic through the process of a literature review. What is consistent is that theory is made up of epistemological and ontological beliefs that span academic disciplines.

The inconsistent use of the terms *methodology* and *method* is of considerable concern to us. Some authors use the terms interchangeably, defining both as the means by which data are collected. Other scholars differentiate

referred to as a[l]. linked to interpretation or hermeneutics (the science and art of interpretation). Also referred to as constructionism, this view is that

> [a]ll knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context. (Crotty, 1998, p. 42)

Constructivism and Constructionism

Constructionism claims that "meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (Crotty, p. 43). Sometimes deemed an epistemology (Crotty, 1998) while also considered a philosophy (Flew, 1984) constructionism and interpretation are concerned with the individual because knowledge is found within the individual. Constructivism seeks to understand individual social action through interpretation or translation. "Something foreign, strange, or separated by time, space, or experience, is made familiar, present, comprehensible" (Hultgren, 1989, p. 41). The aim is to understand aspects of human activity from the perspective of those who experience it (Hultgren). Kuhn (1962) believed that perception is symptomatic of all observation and that all knowledge is dependent on its context. Contrary to objective empiricism, all people, and therefore all researchers, bring with them a lived worldview. Heidegger wrote,

> We must rather choose such a way of access and such a kind of interpretation that this entity can show itself in itself and from itself. And this means that it is to be shown as it is *proximally and for the most part*—in its average everydayness. (1926/1962, p. 38)

Subjectivism

In subjectivist epistemology, meaning is not created from the interplay between humans, but rather meaning is "imported" (Crotty, 1998, p. 9) or brought into the study. For example, Hamrick (1998) used democratic political theory to increase understanding of college student activism. Democratic theory was not created through the interaction between the researcher and her students; rather, it was used as a lens to promote critique and analysis for the purpose of increased understanding, improved praxis, and ultimately liberation.

Unlike positivism and constructivism, subjectivist epistemology suggests that no one can interpret for others. It is only from an inside

perspective that one can grasp meaning. Jürgen Habermas (1984) wrote, "What counts as fundamental is not the interpersonal relation between at least two speaking and acting subjects—a relation that refers back to reaching understanding in language—but the purposive activity of a solitary acting subject" (p. 279). Acting with others and engaging in discourse with them are the means by which there is understanding.

Because some people lack sufficient influence or power to have mastery over their own lives, or because people are afraid of losing the influence and power they have, their communication can be distorted by those with more power. Hence, Habermas believed that just because certain views exist doesn't make them valid (Coomer, 1989). It is through communicative action and discourse that findings are deemed sound.

Comparing Epistemologies

Several authors have created charts highlighting the differences noted above using a variety of comparative criteria (e.g., Coomer & Hultgren, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Sipe & Constable, 1996). These charts are dynamic and illustrate a snapshot of current thinking rather than static definitions. The differences are most obvious at their extremes and do not represent "rigid or unchanging differences/boundaries" (Sipe & Constable, p. 153). We also have constructed a chart comparing epistemologies (see Table 1.4). The criteria we use are those we believe are most instructive in the context of higher education. Because we believe that higher education values utilitarian knowledge, we have selected the nature of knowledge, knowledge claims, and values as important comparative criteria. We offer the comparison chart as a summary of what we have previously discussed.

Experienced researchers will note the absence of postmodernism, poststructuralism, and deconstruction in Table 1.4. We concur with Crotty (1998) that postmodernism and poststructuralism represent theories, though we acknowledge that they are also considered paradigmatic stances (Sipe & Constable, 1996). We turn to theories next as additional aspects of worldview that inform the research process.

CONSIDERATION 3: SITUATING A STUDY IN A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND FRAMEWORK

In the chart noting our definitions of terms, we differentiated between theoretical perspective and framework. Here we will further clarify this distinction and the usefulness of each in situating the research.

Table 1.4 Comparing Epistemologies

	Positivism	Constructivism	Subjectivism
Nature of Reality (ontology)	Measure through observation	Outgrowth of human interaction	Perception can be flawed.
Values	Value neutral	Participant perspective	Passionate action
Relationship Between Researcher and Participants (researcher positionality)	Objective	Interpreter	Passionate participant
Nature of Truth	Universal	Individual	Purported truth can be flawed due to the oppressive nature of the world.

ource: Synthesized from writings of Crotty (1998), Lather (1991), and Lincoln and Guba (2000).

Theoretical Perspective

esearch cannot be conducted without the conscious use of underlying eoretical perspectives" (Broido & Manning, 2002, p. 434). A theoreti- perspective is "the philosophical stance informing the methodology d thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and teria" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). It discusses how the "study fits into theo- ical traditions in the social sciences or applied fields in ways that will new, insightful, or creative" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 35).

There are a number of theoretical perspectives that give direction research. Several are described below. We acknowledge that though ne scholars refer to these theories as *movements* (Pinar et al., 1995), *losophical approaches* (Bronner, 1999), and *paradigmatic stances* (Sipe Constable, 1996), we agree with Crotty (1998) and Radhakrishnan 03) and discuss them here as theory.

Theories most associated with quantitative research include posi- sm and modernism (Crotty, 1998). These theories seek to describe l predict human behavior that is then generalized to a larger popula- n. However, some claim the demise of the foundations of modernism

(Crotty; J. K. Smith, 1993). According to Crotty, this demise came from the scientific community in research that demonstrated "uncertainty" and "limitation" (p. 30). Some philosophers also refuted the logic of induction itself. To subscribe to the scientific method assumes "a world in which the regularities we perceive today will remain unchanged in the future" (Crotty, p. 32). Other philosophers stressed "the absurd nature and the unpredictable in scientific knowledge" (Crotty, p. 38). In light of these revelations,

> Some [scientists and philosophers] have come to reject positivism and the objectivism that informs it and to adopt a constructionist view of meaningful reality. Others remain within the positivist camp but temper very significantly the status they ascribe to their findings. . . . This humbler version of the scientific approach . . . has come to be known as post-positivism. (Crotty, p. 40)

Many theorists, however, believe that postpositivism did not go far enough in moving away from the purported value-free structure of studying the world. Postmodernism is an interdisciplinary theoretical base attacking "any universal characterization of the individual" (Bronner, 1999, p. 189). It has also been described as a cultural, political, and historical movement (Pinar et al., 1995) "wherein no one owns the truth and everyone has the right to be understood" (Doll, 1993, p. 151). There are two other terms closely associated with postmodernism. They are *poststructuralism* and *deconstruction*. All three oppose structuralism. "While structuralism has sought to identify 'the system' that creates meaning, poststructuralism has sought to repudiate, dismantle, and reveal the variance and contingency of 'the system'" (Pinar et al., p. 453). Examples of structuralism would be reproduction theory (that schools reproduce the classist nature of society) and family systems theory. Poststructuralism contends that human reality has been constructed into hierarchical structures to achieve absolute certainty. Poststructuralism seeks not to substitute one absolute for another but rather to produce an awareness of the complexity of what was previously unpresented. Poststructuralism seeks to encourage ambivalence and multiplicity, exceed the boundaries of what can be imagined, expose dichotomies and illusions, and advocate for resistance to subjugation (Lather, 1991).

Deconstruction "disentangles the central threads running through the tapestry . . . of Western thought" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 467). According to Pinar et al., "Heidegger invoked deconstruction to violate the everyday, the taken for granted sphere we construct and employ to evade the ontological facts of our fallenness, our being-toward-death" (p. 447). Deconstruction highlights the way in which "any system of reference is

constituted as [illegible]bric of differences" (Bronner, 1999, p. 193). One way of accomplishing this is by exposing the oppressive language and structure of a phenomenon under study. According to Caputo (1987), the work of destruction or deconstruction is deployed on two levels. In the first place, it must break through the commonplace described in terms of the present, in order to exhibit a deeper understanding. The deeper level Caputo referred to as a redical recovery. It is a recovery of the self.

Space does not allow for a thorough discussion of postmodernism, poststructuralism, and deconstructivism. Experienced researchers will note the brevity here. Scholars have described the relationship of the three, some of it in disagreement. Clearly, these concepts are continually being refined as they are lived. A gross simplification would be that postmodernism subsumes the other two, that poststructuralism is the left arm of postmodernism, that postmodernism articulates many of the ideas advanced by postructuralism and deconstruction (Pinar et al.), and that there are certain similarities in all three (Bronner, 1999). For an interesting metaphoric description of these theories, consult Sipe and Constable (1996) on how paradigmatic stances are like sports, colors, and famous people. The point is that these theories create a lens through which researchers can describe their perspectives of the phenomenon under study and the study itself. Researchers must become sufficiently familiar with theoretical perspectives so that theory can inform the perspective of their study.

There are other theories associated with the postmodern stance. These theories seek not only to abandon the limits and hegemony of positivism but also to replace it with justice promoting praxis. Critical theory is sometimes viewed as an epistemology (Coomer & Hultgren, 1989), a paradigm position (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), a paradigmatic stance (Sipe & Constable, 1996), and a theory (Crotty, 1998). *Critical theory* or *critical science* refers to the

> situation where human experiences are systematically repressed in a given society. . . . It views society as a human construction that can be altered through human understanding of taken-for-granted structures from the fiber of human life in the society. (Coomer, 176–177)

Habermas's notion of communicative action serves as a base for critical theory. He believed that communicative discourse is emancipatory. "With the concept of communicative action there comes into play the additional presupposition of a *linguistic medium* that reflects the actor-world relations as such" (1981/1984, p. 94).

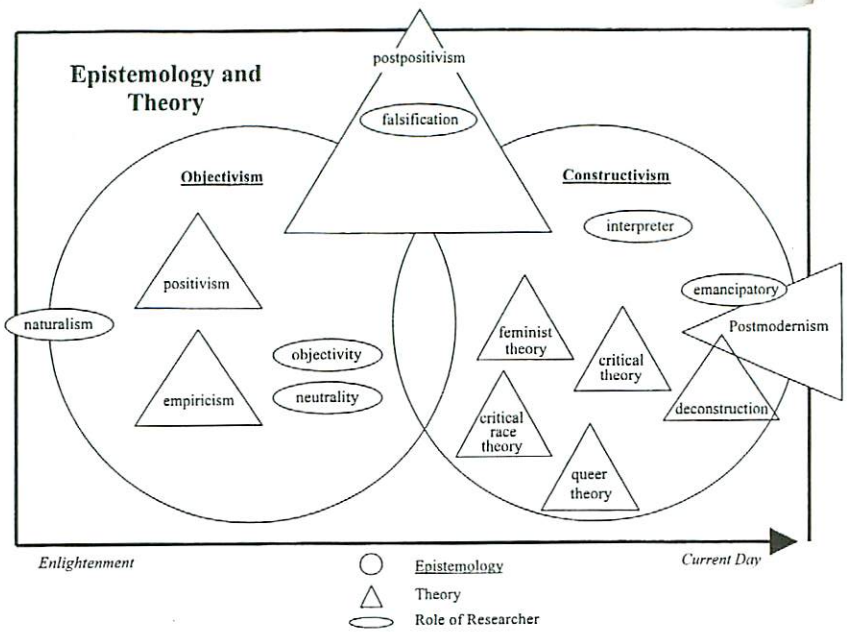


Figure 1.2

Still other theories within the postmodern view include feminist theory ("[V]ery simply, to do feminist research is to put social construction of gender at the center of one's inquiry"; Lather, 1991, p. 71), critical race theory ("[R]acism is an ingrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural"; Delgado, 1995, p. xiv), and queer theory ("the ways the very homo/hetero distinctions [have] underpinned all aspects of contemporary life"; Gamson, 2000, p. 354).

Grasping these theoretical perspectives, their relationships to each other, and their relationship to epistemology is complex. We have tried to provide an instructive way to describe these complexities in Figure 1.2. What is noted here in this frame are epistemologies and theories that inform research along a chronological continuum from the Enlightenment to the current day. Postpositivism, poststructuralism, postmodernism, and deconstruction are depicted partly outside the frame because they all continue to be defined and refined and resist definition. Two epistemologies, objectivism and constructivism, are noted here as circles. Theories are indicated as triangles, and the role of the researcher or researcher positionality within the epistemology is noted within ovals. Theories associated within the epistemology of objectivism are positivism and empiricism. Postpositivism emerged from the postmodern protest of the notions of the supposed objective and

neutral researcher and of truth emanating from exacting measurement. This is illustrated by the postpositivism triangle merging the objective and contructivist epistemologies. We note naturalism as the precursor to objectivism prior to the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason.

The constructivist epistemology is informed by poststructuralism, postmodernism, and deconstruction theories (also referred to as *schools* and *movements*). These theories are noted in larger triangles because they are more broad in scope and influence critical, critical race, feminist, and queer theories. Researchers in the constructivist epistemology are interpreters. Their role is to understand phenomena in an inventive way. The more closely the researcher is associated with poststructuralism, the more he or she seeks to emancipate society from its hegemonic structures through deconstruction (Figure 1.2).

In good qualitative studies, researchers identify the theoretical perspectives that guide their work. For example, in her article reporting on the Safe Zone project, Evans (2002) described her study as grounded in constructivist philosophy and stated that critical theory "undergirded" the study because the researchers viewed research as being able to contribute to the emancipation and empowerment of oppressed groups, a principle of critical theory.

Let us return to Michael. As Michael seeks to refine his compelling interest, he has many questions. He doesn't know where or how to start, and is feeling anxious about the research process. He worries whether he knows enough about his topic and research design to embark upon his study. He seeks out his advisor, who suggests that he look to theory for guidance.

Having done some preliminary reading about postmodern theory, Michael decides that feminist and queer theories offer guidance, not only on how he proceeds with his study but also about the phenomenon of safety itself. By using feminist theory as a lens, Michael is hoping that he might be better able to understand how gender plays a role in feeling safe. He also wonders how the coming-out process described in queer theory might illuminate the struggle with being truly present in a space that is hostile. How is it to come out as oneself in a place where safety is not expected? How is it to continually have to decide whether or how to come out with each new environment?

Theoretical Framework

Whereas theoretical perspective influences how the researcher will approach and design the study, and influences how the researcher will approach the topic under study in more abstract terms, the theoretical framework offers suppositions that inform the phenomenon under study. The theoretical framework links the unsettled question to "larger theoretical constructs."

Michael looks to campus environment theory to offer him insight into his study. This assists him in refining his question. He decides to use Moos's (1979) work in environment theory and Schlossberg's (1989) work on mattering and marginality to inform his topic. He reads campus environment theory (theoretical framework) simultaneously with feminist and queer theory (theoretical perspective). Both assist him in forming his question. As Michael proceeds, however, he will continually seek out literature to better inform his study. For example, in a study on White Being, Jan initially gathered information on White racial identity theory, White privilege, authenticness, and guilt and shame to better inform her compelling interest (theoretical framework) while simultaneously looking to Heidegger's notions on phenomenology to guide the design of the study (theoretical perspective) (Arminio, 2001; Arminio & McEwen, 1996). Later, when collecting data through conversations, Jan became aware of the influence that busing to achieve integrated schools had on participants in their meaning making of race. Coles's (1993) work on service and school busing offered revealing insight (additional theoretical framework) of the experience of entering other American cultures by bus. She used this literature to better inform her of her compelling interest after initial data had been collected. With insights from theoretical perspective and theoretical framework, Michael now seeks to frame his statement of purpose and research question.

CONSIDERATION 4: CHOOSING A QUESTION THAT PRESSES UPON US

> [T]he path to all knowledge leads through the question.
>
> **Gadamer (1960/1989, p. 363)**

It is from a compelling interest that those engaged in a study find unsettled questions. Gadamer noted that questioning is "more passion than an action. A question presses itself on us; we can no longer avoid it and persist in our accustomed opinion" (p. 366). Gadamer cautioned us to differentiate between a question and an opinion. A question is "not settled," whereas an opinion is. Several unsettled questions typically emerge from a compelling interest. Often, researchers contemplate a question that is either too broad or too narrow, or may generate several disparate unsettled questions from a compelling interest. A compelling interest offers the opportunity to dwell upon an unsettled question that should lead to a manageable study.

Factors of do-ability assist in determining which of the unsettled questions to undertake. Below are samples of compelling interests that led to research questions in studies that have been published. Note that the worldview of the researcher framed how the question was posed.

- A pressing interest in men's identity development led to the questions of "how college men internally experience externally defined gender roles" and how "conflicts related to socially constructed gender roles may impact men's identity development" (Davis, 2002, p. 510).
- An interest in understanding multiple leadership belief systems of organizational members at community colleges led to the question "How does positionality (i.e., gender, race, role within an organization, and field of study) relate to construction of leadership?" (Kezar, 2002, p. 563).
- To address the need "for a holistic picture of Latina/o doctoral student experiences. . . . The purpose of this study was to bring to the forefront the voices of Latina/o students in the process of attaining a Ph. D." (Gonzalez, Marin, Figueroa, Moreno, & Navia, 2002, pp. 541–542).
- Contemplating how to better understand dissenting students' efforts to change campus environments led to the question of how democratic political theory is useful in "helping student affairs professionals develop and sustain a campus environment that facilitates student exercise of democratic citizenship" (Hamrick, 1998, p. 449).
- A compelling interest in how interaction across dimensions of race, ethnicity, and social class through service learning influences the understanding of diversity led to the question "How do students and community participants come to understand diversity in the context of service learning?" (Jones & Hill, 2001).

As was noted in the discussion on deconstruction, the language one uses n describing a phenomenon illuminates its hegemonic structure. What are he implications of language in the research that educators conduct?

Implications for Language

The worldview of the researcher is communicated through language, whether explicitly or implicitly. A differing of opinion exists about whether those whose studies are grounded in a qualitative paradigm hould use the same language of the "found world" (e.g., quantitative esearch; Smith & Deemer, 2000, p. 885) or create new language. Some scholars, such as Smith and Deemer (2000) and Smith (1993), believe that new language should be used that allows for "moving out from under the shadow of empirical-analytical expectations" (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002, p. 449). However, others, like Lather (1991), take terms from the positivistic paradigm and transform them to be applicable to other views of knowledge. For example, Lather offered a "reconceptualization of validity" (p. 66) appropriate for research that is openly committed to a more just social order by advocating for catalytic validity that "by far is . . . most unorthodox; it flies directly in the face of the positivist demand for research neutrality" (p. 68).

It is important that those engaged in research realize that the language they choose represents and communicates an epistemological worldview. For many of us, the language of objective positivism has been entrenched in our schooling to the point where we assume that words like *validity*, *reliability*, *sampling*, *correlation*, *rigor*, *significance*, and *comparison* have a universal use, but they can represent a particular research paradigm. As constructors of reality instead of solely being in contact with reality, researchers are responsible for understanding the implications of the language used.

Below are examples of language as represented by theoretical perspective:

Quantitative	**Qualitative**
Variable	Theme, category, multidimensionality
Correlate	Interpret, reflect, mutually shaping
Statistical significance	Profound, illuminating
Sample/subjects	Participants, co-researchers, co-travelers
Rigor	Goodness, worthiness
Validity	Trustworthiness, catalytic validity
Proof	Judgments, perceptions, textual rendering
Discovery, findings	Constructing, meaning making
Generalizations	Contextual findings, appropriations
Outlier	Unique
Mechanical	Morphogenesis
Objective	Tending to participants, indwell, human-as-subject

Bhaskar (1979) noted a poignant example of the implications of epistemology on language. Under Nazi rule,

1. Germa[illegible]as depopulated.
2. Millions of people died.
3. Millions of people were killed.
4. Millions of people were massacred.

Bhaskar stated that though all four are true, only the fourth is a "precise and accurate description of what actually happened" (p. 76), because only the last implies that the deaths were a part of an organized campaign. "This point is important. For social science is not only about a subject matter, it is for an audience" (Bhaskar, 1979, p. 76). In the first three statements, we must question what is implicitly valued in the attempt to be value free. The fourth statement does not attempt at being value free. But which more adequately describes the event?

An example from the literature in higher education is found in the following: "Consequently, compared to their peers with highly educated parents, first-generation students are more likely to be handicapped in accessing and understanding information and attitudes relevant to making beneficial decisions" (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). How might this quote be viewed differently by the reader if it were said by a first-generation student rather than the researcher? How does the researcher's worldview promote the use of the word *handicapped* in this way? What language does one use about those with whom one is studying? How do these terms represent, re-present, and communicate the relationship? Kezar (2004) commented,

> A student tells me she wants to study the experience of graduate students in the United States who come from other countries. She wants to examine their experience in a foreign place. . . . [I ask her] what does it mean to use the term foreign? Is she comfortable with this term and its implications in her study? (p. 46)

What is communicated about the relationship between those being studied and the person conducting the study by the use of those words?

Words such as *illuminate*, *explore*, *discerning*, *meaning*, and *spirited* represent an openness to mutual construction and enlightenment (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). Some interpretive methodologies such as hermeneutical phenomenology encourage "troubling" the language (Ellsworth, 1997) to better express what is intended. *Troubling the language* means that words are used in a slightly new or different way in order to challenge the status quo. For example, in an article on the question of criteria of qualitative research, Arminio and Hultgren asked, "How do we as phenomenologists understand our respons-ability to reframing criteria?" (p. 447). "Respons-ability" troubles the word *responsibility* by highlighting the notion of the ability to respond in the word *responsibility*. This may be considered a "play on words," but this play or troubling extends the "potential of words to spread understanding beyond accustomed boundaries" (p. 452). Jones (2002) also troubled the language to extend meaning potential in her title "(Re)Writing the Word: Methodological Strategies and Issues in Qualitative Research." She wrote,

> To (re)write the word, to engage in research that holds potential for getting closer to what is true about a particular phenomenon, for exhibiting true generosity, and for contributing to the elimination of inequality, those most fully engaged in qualitative research must recognize the complexities in the effort. (p. 472)

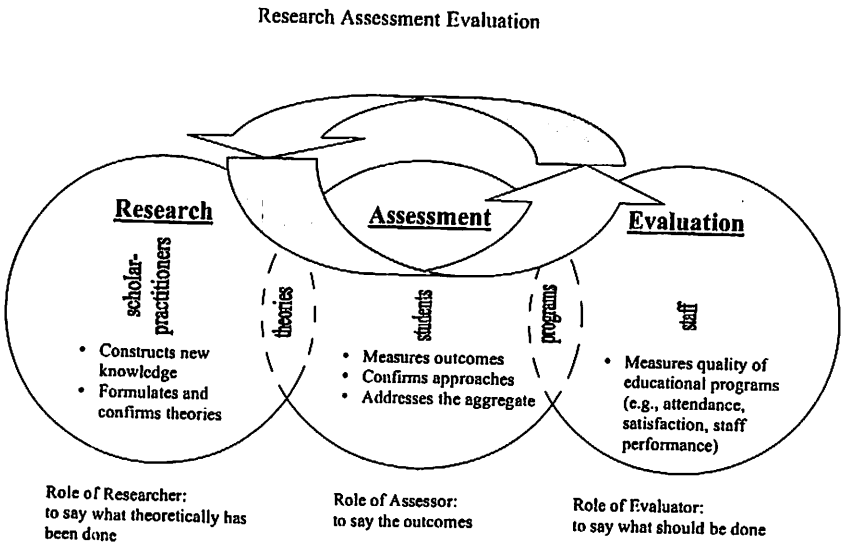
The use of "(re)write" emphasizes the importance of revising for deeper understanding that may be lost with the more commonplace use of *rewrite*.

Let us return to Michael and his efforts at situating his research. Michael has decided that his worldview is consistent with the constructivist and interpretive epistemologies because he has noticed how he learns through interactions with others. He believes that perception defines people's realities and believes that he is best able to learn about the experience of safety through interaction with others. He wants to "probe deep" with others about their experiences. He wonders how experiences of safety and feelings of inclusion relate. He refines his compelling interest into an unsettled question in language that represents and communicates his worldview: "What is the lived definition of campus safety for students who feel unsafe?"

CONSIDERATION 5: RESEARCH, ASSESSMENT, OR EVALUATION

For what purpose does Michael engage in this study? Another aspect of situating a study is whether the study is research, assessment, or evaluation. Upcraft and Shuh (2002) admitted that differentiating these may be seen as not very relevant. We believe it is for several reasons. First, by exposing the differences, we highlight the point that qualitative methodologies can be used in assessments and evaluations, not only in research. Although many institutions have institutional research offices, assessment tasks typically are add-on responsibilities to educators outside of such offices (Ewell, 2002). Furthermore, many staff and administrators in higher education believe they are conducting assessments when in fact they are conducting evaluations. Differentiating these data-gathering activities recognizes the burgeoning scholarship of assessment (Ewell).

Briefly, research concerns theory: forming it, confirming it, disconfirming it. Research assumes broader implications than one institution or program. Assessment, on the other hand, is more focused on the outcomes of participant programs, though this can be very broad as to include an entire institution. It does not infer individual student outcomes. The purpose of assessment is to guide practice rather than relate practice to theory. Evaluation is even more particular to a specific program and is concerned with the satisfaction, organization, and attendance of a program. As Figure 1.3 indicates, there is some overlap and the three are related. For example, a program may be based on a theory particular to adult student development. Outcomes of the theory-based program are assessed to determine if adult students are indeed gaining from the program what was intended. Using the assessment outcome data to change policy and practices related to the program is evaluation (Upcraft, 2003). The three are not mutually exclusive but rather have a dialectic relationship. Marshall and Rossman (1999) referred to this as the cycle of inquiry, which is depicted by the arrow in Figure 1.3. What is important to remember is that the means of conducting a study, whether for research, assessment, or evaluation



Erwin, 1996
Upcraft & Shuh, 2002
Upcraft, 2003

Figure 1.3

(design, sampling, method for collecting and analyzing data), can be similar, but the purpose of conducting research, assessment, and evaluation differs.

Michael has decided to situate his study as research because he is seeking to consider how students experience safety in a broad sense, rather than particular to any one program or outcome. The purpose of his study is not to create or confirm theory; it is a priori. In addition, he seeks insight that is beyond a bounded context. He seeks to explore more than just satisfaction or dissatisfaction with safety or who is safe and who is not (evaluation), but rather the questions of what safety is, how it is experienced, when it is not experienced, and why. How do students negotiate being safe? How do they make meaning of safety? Michael now has articulated his compelling question and has determined that his purpose is research. He also must contemplate how it is that he will be with the participants of his research study.

CONSIDERATION 6: RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

Positionality describes the relationship between the researcher and his or her participants and the researcher and his or her topic. Research paradigm, theoretical perspective, and methodology all influence those relationships. However, Fine (1994) believed that positionality does involve decision making on the part of the researcher, including the way in which researchers will represent or, more accurately, "re-present" (p. 110) participants. What is happening between the researcher and participants during the study? Researchers must address not only what is said but also what is not, not only what was said and quoted but also what is being protected from public view and why. Are researchers protecting the elite? Are researchers protecting themselves? Are researchers even conscious of what they include or exclude? Vasti stated that journaling and consulting with advisors during her research assisted in addressing these questions (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2002).

This concept is so important to good qualitative work that it will be addressed in several subsequent chapters in more depth. For now, however, it is important for the reader to know that deciding upon the relationship of the researcher to the researched is one of the fundamental considerations that researchers must make as they embark upon their work.

Michael realizes that his experiences with feeling unsafe shape how he will engage with his participants. He also realizes that his role as researcher and graduate student; his gender, race, and sexual orientation;

and his status as a first-generation college student influence the relationship he will establish with his participants. He considers how to engender trust with his participants throughout the research process.

SUMMARY

Situating a study necessitates determining within what epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and method the question will be explored. Not appropriately situating a study is a frequent mistake made by researchers who believe that qualitative research is simply interviewing a few people and noting common themes. The analogy below may help you differentiate the different phases of situating your study.

If you were to consider your study a journey, the fundamental elements would be the following:

- Destination: increased understanding about an unsettled question
- Territory to travel upon: epistemological worldview
- Map: theoretical perspective
- Specific routes to take: methodology (to be discussed in Chapter 2)
- Mode of transportation: method (also to be discussed further in Chapter 2)

There are several means and routes that will take you to the same destination. However, some routes are appropriate for some modes of travel. For example, you wouldn't travel very far by riding your bicycle on railroad tracks using an atlas as a guide. Yet, sometimes this happens when researchers frame a question not consistent with their worldview or use a method of collecting data that is not consistent with a particular methodology and not grounded in its founding philosophy. Apprentice researchers often find the notion that there are several appropriate ways to explore a question frustrating. Situating an unsettled question in a consistent epistemology, theoretical perspective and framework, and methodology is crucial because often during a project, questions arise that can only be answered when epistemology, theoretical perspective, and positionality are consistently grounded (Maykut & Morehouse, 2001). For example, in a study conducted by Jan, a participant shared a poignant story that appeared to be unrelated to the compelling interest (Arminio & McEwen, 1996). Yet, the story itself was compelling. As is customary with her chosen methodology, she convened a human science dialogue with other researchers knowledgeable of her methodology. Together, using the methodology as a guide, they determined how to appropriately use the story to illuminate the phenomenon under study.

Often, there are delays along the inquiry journey. They are not always negative. In fact, often delays or detours can lead to unexpected insight. When this occurs, and it will, researchers should use the map (theoretical perspective and framework) and specific routes (methodology) to continue.

EXERCISES

Two exercises are offered here to assist the reader in using the elements necessary for situating a study.

1. Below are long quotations from various philosophers upon which views on research have been constructed. Note the philosophical differences in these four quotes. Consider how these differences influence views on knowledge and research. All four describe a philosophical approach to language.

Language: A Look at Four Philosophical Perspectives

A.

Language is as old as consciousness—language *is* the first practical, real consciousness, existing for other people, and hence also for me; and language like consciousness, first arises from need, the need of intercourse with other people. (My relation to my environment is my consciousness.) Where a relationship exists, there it exists for me; the animal "*relates*" to nothing and altogether not at all. For the animal, its relationship to other ones does not exist as relationship. Hence consciousness is from the outset a societal product and remains such as long as men exist together. (Marx, cited in Padover, 1977, p. 72)

In like manner, the beginner who has learned a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue, but he assimilates the spirit of the new language and expresses himself freely in it only when he moves in it without recalling the old and when he forgets his native tongue. (Marx, cited in Padover, 1977, pp. 21–22)

B.

The guiding idea . . . is *that the fusion of horizons that takes place in understanding is actually the achievement of language.* Admittedly, what language is belongs among the most mysterious questions that man ponders. Language is so uncannily near our thinking, and when it functions it is so little an object, that it seems to conceal its own being from us. In our analysis of the thinking of the human sciences,

however, we c… so close to this universal mystery of language that is prior to everything else, that we can entrust ourselves to what we are investigating to guide us safely in the quest. In other words we are endeavoring to approach the mystery of language from the conversation that we ourselves are. (Gadamer, 1989, p. 378)

C.

With the concept of communicative action there comes into play the additional presupposition of a *linguistic medium* that reflects the actor-world relations as such. At this level of concept formation the rationality problematic, which until now has arisen only for the social scientist, moves into the perspective of the agent himself. We have to make clear in what sense achieving understanding in language is thereby introduced as a mechanism for coordinating action. Even the strategic model of action *can* be understood in such a way that participants' actions[,] directed through egocentric calculations of utility and coordinated through interest positions, are mediated through speech acts. In the cases of normatively regulated and dramaturgical action we even *have* to suppose a consensus formation among participants that is in principle of a linguistic nature. Nevertheless, in these three models of action language is conceived *one-sidedly* in different respects. (Habermas, 1981/1984, p. 94)

Only the communicative model of action presupposes language as a medium of uncurtailed communication whereby speakers and hearers, out of the context of their preinterpreted lifeworld, refer simultaneously to things in the objective, social, and subjective worlds in order to negotiate common definitions of the situation. (Habermas, 1984, p. 95)

D.

Words are sensible signs, necessary for Communication. Man, though he have great variety of thoughts, and such from which others as well as himself might receive profit and delight; yet they are all within his own breast, invisible and hidden from others, nor can of themselves be made [to] appear. The comfort and advantage of society not being to be had without communication of thoughts, it was necessary that man should find out some external sensible signs, whereof those invisible ideas, which his thoughts are made up of, might be made known to others. For this purpose nothing was so fit, either for plenty or quickness, as those articulate sounds, which with so much ease and variety he found himself able to make. Thus we may conceive how *words*, which were by nature so well adapted to that purpose,

come to be made use of by men as the signs of their ideas; not by any natural connection that there is between particular articulate sounds and certain ideas, for then there would be but one language amongst all men; but by a voluntary imposition, whereby such a word is made arbitrarily the mark of such an idea. The use, then, of words, is to be sensible marks of ideas; and the ideas they stand for are their proper and immediate signification. (Woozley, 1964, p. 259)

[B]ut upon a greater approach, I find that there is so close a connection between ideas and words, and our abstract ideas and general words have so constant a relation one to another, that it is impossible to speak clearly and distinctly of our knowledge, which all consists in propositions, without considering first the nature, use and signification of language. (Woozley, 1964, p. 255)

Answers and References

A. Karl Marx: subjective (Padover, 1977)

B. Hans-Georg Gadamer: interpretive (Gadamer, 1989)

C. Jürgen Habermas: subjective (Habermas, 1981/1984)

D. John Locke: objective positivism (Woozley, 1964)

2. Note on a piece of paper your compelling interest of study. From that interest area, write questions that would inform you about your compelling interest. Which one "presses upon you"? Eliminate those for which you already hold a closed opinion. Eliminate those that are too narrow or specific and those that are too broad. Identify the epistemological framework in which your questions are best situated.