

Introduction: A Sense of Things to Come

In qualitative research, you translate life into text. It is not an exact translation, a mirror image, but a product *inspired*—or breathed into—by the lives you observe and by what you, as researchers, bring to the setting and research interactions. A friend told me about a conversation she had with her niece Emily, who was taking a required humanities class in literature. Emily had had to read a poem about a woman and a storm, and then write an essay. “The poem made me think about the big storms here in Nebraska, and so I wrote about those storms coming across the prairies,” Emily said. She added, “I got it all wrong.” When her aunt asked her to explain, Emily sighed, “Did you know that a storm in a poem means an affair? I missed the whole point.”

Emily brought her experiences of storms in Nebraska to the poem—that, and her very limited experience with poetry. If she reads (and writes) more poetry and receives additional instruction in poetic interpretation, Emily probably will write very different essays. Although not necessarily right or wrong, some portrayals can be better informed than others. This book is meant to help you become better informed about translating your research experiences—your observations and interviews—through analysis and interpretation into informed and useful texts.

NEW TO THIS EDITION

“What can be involved in updating a textbook on research?” my nonacademic friends continue to ask. “How is it possible that the process for doing research changes?”

I reply that methodological perspectives continually change, specifically in qualitative research, an approach noted for its variety and complexity, particularly during these times when issues of difference, plurality, justice, and meaning demand our attention. When the first edition of this text was published (1992), relatively few qualitative methods texts were available, particularly in disciplines other than anthropology. Twenty-three years later, the qualitative research literature is vast, with thick handbooks on topics barely imagined in the early 1990s. This development is exciting, signaling that people in multiple disciplines have turned to qualitative inquiry as a means for exploring and understanding aspects of social life. In the process, however, approaches to and critiques of qualitative methods have proliferated. This expansion is overwhelming for a writer of an introductory text.

One text cannot address all issues that are now part of qualitative research lore. What I can do is to clarify where this text is situated among the array of qualitative theories and methodologies, so you, the reader, are better informed about what you might be getting into through reading this book. I point the way to other books and authors that will help you deepen your knowledge of topics only mentioned or briefly described in this text. I also try to reflect on the methods and procedures discussed in this text and present ways in which they are embraced and challenged in theory and in practice. I also introduce several newer aspects of qualitative research (such as arts based research) that are less discussed in other introductory texts.

Some of the specific changes to this text since the last edition (2011) include the following:

1. New textual narratives, figures, tables, and visual imagery have been added throughout the book to exemplify or stimulate thought about the accompanying discussions.
2. To better inform readers about the array of qualitative methodological possibilities, this edition includes discussion of more methodologies within the text, as well as in an appendix.
3. Chapter 2 has been reorganized and expanded to better assist novice researchers through the steps of creating research proposals.
4. Chapter 3 includes more discussion about fieldnotes, along with new examples.
5. In Chapter 4, the section on developing interview questions has been expanded.
6. Chapter 6 on research ethics has been reorganized and extended to address the history and concerns of Institutional Review Boards. It discusses the codes of ethics of various disciplines in the United States and elsewhere.
7. Chapter 7 on data analysis pays more attention to coding procedures, along with new examples.
8. Chapter 8 on writing up research includes discussion on research representation and explores some of the issues associated with the “crisis of representation.”
9. Chapter 9 has been revised to focus on arts based research, including examples of various creative ways to approach and/or represent qualitative work.
10. A section on presenting at conferences and an expanded discussion of publishing have been added to the last chapter to encourage new researchers to widely share their work.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THE TEXT

Chapters tend to compartmentalize thoughts, giving the impression that data collection, for example, is distinct from data analysis. Although the activities of qualitative inquiry tend to be ongoing and overlapping, I use chapters to focus

upon one research aspect at a time. My guiding principle throughout these pages has been to create a book I would want to use as a primary text to help others learn to conduct qualitative inquiry. The book therefore guides you through the research process, with separate chapters on philosophical foundations (Chapter 1), research design (Chapter 2), participant observation and document collection (Chapter 3), interviewing (Chapter 4), data analysis (Chapter 7), and writing (Chapter 8). Other chapters focus on issues of field relationships, rapport, and reflexivity (Chapter 5); research ethics (Chapter 6); and the relatively new area of arts based research (Chapter 9). The final chapter both summarizes and looks forward to ways in which the research and its process may be applied and helpful to you and to others.

Some reviewers have suggested that the order of the chapters be rearranged so that all the “foundational” ones come first (i.e., the chapters on philosophical foundations (Chapter 1), design (Chapter 2), field relationships (Chapter 5), and ethics (Chapter 6). This makes logical sense and the book could easily be read or taught in that order. For me and some of my colleagues, however, the semester time-limit and our desire to include the assignment of a pilot project to accompany the text imposes the order of the chapters as they are. By jumping into reading about research methods after the chapter on research design, students can more quickly conceive a plan for a pilot project, begin gaining access, and start scheduling times for data collection while the class reads and discusses chapters on field relationships and research ethics.

The chapters pose subjects, questions, and quandaries with which students, colleagues, and I have struggled. As students in my classes have noted, my most frequent answer to questions raised by qualitative inquiry is “It depends.” In class discussions and in this book, I provide no solutions or absolutes. My goal is to raise questions, thereby indicating what is problematic, and to suggest guidelines for developing your own judgment in order to learn from and manage the complex issues you may encounter.

Because many of you will be working on theses or dissertations, I periodically address some of the particular problems that you might encounter. Many of the text examples are drawn from educational settings, but the book is not limited to the context of schools nor to the needs of scholars of education. The sources of examples are the experiences of students, my own inquiries, the research of colleagues, including Alan Peshkin (who I invited to be coauthor of the first edition), and published works. I am most indebted to my students; they have taught me much about qualitative inquiry. With permission, I identify their examples by their first names, or, for some, by pseudonyms.

From my perspective, acquiring the skill and understanding for conducting qualitative inquiry has three dimensions: reading, doing, and reflecting. Preferably, all three are done simultaneously so that the outcomes of each continually interact. Read widely and deeply about your topic *and* about the conduct of inquiry throughout the research process; you might want to begin with the “Recommended Readings” sections at the ends of the chapters. Practice qualitative research techniques on problems of significance to you as you read about doing qualitative research.

Ideally, the course is an occasion for supervised pilot studies. Reflect before and after each step in your research journey (from developing your research statement to completing your research report) by keeping a field journal and by holding discussions with peers, supervisors, and research participants.

Keeping a field journal that describes your practices and, no less important, your critical reflections on these practices is crucial for doing good research. The field journal, in effect, becomes a personal methods book that contains the insights that result from the interaction of reading, reflecting, and doing research. Learning to reflect on your behavior and thoughts, as well as on the phenomenon under study, creates a means for continuously becoming a better researcher. *Becoming* a better researcher captures the dynamic nature of the process. Conducting research, like teaching or dancing, can be improved; it cannot be mastered.

PERSONAL POSITIONINGS: MY METHODOLOGICAL GROUND(ING)

My background and experience is in ethnographic and case study research, as well as various forms of action research, including participatory action research and collaborative research. I have lived and worked in various parts of the world and have maintained an interest in theories of development and globalization. Even though I attempt to inform myself on inquiry paradigms and methodologies of qualitative research with which I am less familiar, I cannot do justice to them all or even to a portion of them. This section, therefore, delineates some boundaries for this text.

This book is rooted in the interpretive tradition of qualitative inquiry. Although I briefly introduce and make reference throughout the text to critical and postmodern/poststructural traditions, this book is not meant to be a methods book for those seeking to do research within those paradigms—although they may find some of the advice in this text fitting and useful. Within the interpretive tradition, different research approaches developed historically, geographically, and by discipline, including sociology (symbolic interactionism, grounded theory), psychology (phenomenology), and anthropology (ethnography). *Ethnography* is perhaps the term that is most widely used, whether correctly or not, to refer to research in the interpretive tradition. It also carries with it a lot of baggage in its ties to colonial anthropology. Nonetheless, the research methods associated with ethnography (fieldwork, interviews, observations, document collection) are used in many other qualitative methodologies (although expectations for fieldwork, kinds of interview questions, analysis techniques, and so forth can vary widely). This book focuses on methods used in ethnographic research, including current critiques, challenges, and changes.

I believe in the wisdom of local people, whether in a farming community in Illinois or a barrio in Mexico City; I believe that there are “organic” intellectuals everywhere, working to keep traditions alive and also to shape a changing future. I am partial to inquiry approaches that involve research participants

in the work, particularly in identifying the overarching research question and, thereby, in designing research that will be useful to the people involved. I also believe that much is to be learned from conventional qualitative methods, that you can learn and practice basic techniques and then adapt them as your skills and inclinations guide you. This book, therefore, is meant to be an introductory text to the ethnographic research techniques of data collection, analysis, and writing. Along the way, however, I have added sections that are meant to probe into and complicate some of these practices.

Communicating the process of qualitative inquiry provides me some of the same kinds of rewards that teaching swimming did years ago. At the end of a semester (or, better, two semesters), students no longer fear to jump in, nor are they at risk of drowning in data. With careful, sure strokes, they stride through data collection, analysis, and writing—albeit not without the occasional stormy day. Students gain useful skills that can serve them beyond the thesis and dissertation stages. In return, I have learned much from students about both the process of doing qualitative research and their topical areas. They educate me, for example, about the social construction of developmental disabilities or about the workings of effective partner team-teaching in middle schools. I believe that qualitative research can provide a forum for reflection and communication that results in better programs, gives voice to those who have been marginalized, and assists researchers, participants, and readers to see the world in new ways. For comments, suggestions, or questions, please contact me at ceglesne@yahoo.com.

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CHAPTER 1

Meeting Qualitative Inquiry

Sofie knew and taught me that everyone had some story, every house held a life that could be penetrated and known, if one took the trouble. Stories told to oneself or others could transform the world. Waiting for others to tell their stories, even helping them do so, meant no one could be regarded as completely dull, no place people lived in was without some hope of redemption, achieved by paying attention.

(Myerhoff, 1979, p. 240)

BEGINNINGS

Anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff was talking about the grandmother who raised her and who, through her love of people's stories, perhaps set the course for Myerhoff's life. Learning to listen well to others' words and to interpret and retell the accounts is integral to many kinds of qualitative research.

Because qualitative researchers seek to make sense of actions and narratives, and the ways in which they intersect, I begin with an account of my connections to research. If you know something about my story, you may better understand and interpret the perspectives in the work that follows. This beginning also contextualizes and introduces you to different research projects that I refer to throughout the book as I draw upon my experiences to illustrate methodological advice and reflections.

I do not remember "discovering" qualitative inquiry. The process, however, is one with which I have been familiar for some time. I grew up in a small, rural midwestern town where almost everyone went to church (no synagogues, no mosques) and almost everyone had European ancestry (mine was Norwegian and Welsh). I grew up interested in people whose lives were different from mine. I read each month's *National Geographic* and filled my nights with folktales from around the world. Books such as *Arctic Wild* (Crisler, 1958) and *No Room in the Ark* (Moorehead, 1959) from my parents' bookshelves supplemented library books about travelers, explorers, and adventurers from Genghis Khan to Amelia Earhart.

I gravitated toward anthropology as an undergraduate, which allowed me to continue learning about the many different ways people live. For anthropologists, fieldwork—being present in others' lives—is *the* method to learning about

another culture. The more I read, the more I wanted to experience life elsewhere. Thus began a postgraduate trek in which I traveled and worked from Wales to Afghanistan. On a kibbutz in Israel, I pollinated date palms, pruned banana plants, picked grapefruit, and grew increasingly interested in tropical agriculture. Later, I lived in Jerusalem and joined a team of archaeologists for a year. I continued with archaeological work in northern Kenya, where I camped in dry riverbeds and walked over tracks of rhinos and lions as I helped to trace the southern migration of people away from the Nile 10,000 years ago. Throughout this period, I kept journals. As I read them now, I am struck by my joy about what I was learning and my frustration about how to make sense of all I was encountering. Constantly stimulated by different ways of doing things and multiple ways of understanding them, I was restless and eager to go beyond experiences. Such desires led me to graduate school with plans to apply anthropology through education. I took courses that provided theory and structure for what I had been doing haphazardly on my own.

My first qualitative research project, my master's thesis, was an interview and archival study of Illinois rural women who worked the land. As a doctoral student, I assisted Alan Peshkin in conducting an ethnography of a fundamentalist Christian school. Peshkin moved into the community where the school was located. The other assistant and I spent two days a week at the school throughout one academic year, observing from the back of classrooms and conducting multiple-session interviews with teachers and students.

Before beginning dissertation research, I worked as an action researcher (defined later in this chapter) in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines as part of a multiple-nation Caribbean Agricultural Extension Project under the direction of Michael Quinn Patton.¹ There I assisted representatives of various farmers' groups and agricultural organizations to create a national agricultural extension plan. For my dissertation, I returned to Saint Vincent to carry out ethnographic research in one rural village, focusing on young people, agriculture, and education.

As a professor at the University of Vermont (UVM), I began teaching various courses in qualitative research. Novelists and poets lament that if they are teaching writing, they find little time to write. The same applies to teaching qualitative research. My research was limited to sabbaticals (the first in Costa Rica, the second in Oaxaca, Mexico) supplemented by short-term evaluation work and a life history project. Although I had been trained in conventional ethnographic methods, by the time I went to Costa Rica in 1993, I wanted to do research *with* and not *on* others (both conventional and more collaborative research methods are discussed later in this chapter). I volunteered my research skills and worked with an environmental group in the small community in which I was living. Seven years later, my next sabbatical allowed me to continue this mode of research in Oaxaca (discussed in Chapter 2).

In 2002, I received the opportunity to work as a traveling professor with the International Honors Program (IHP), a study-abroad program now affiliated with the School for International Training. For nine months, thirty students and three professors lived in six countries studying issues of culture, ecology, and justice,

guided by coordinators, activists, environmentalists, and intellectuals in each country. I continued in various capacities with IHP for a dozen years, interspersed with other responsibilities such as directing a semester program and teaching courses in Oaxaca, Mexico, for UVM. In 2011, sponsored by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, I conducted a year-long study of seven academic art museums and was inspired by ways in which professors and museum personnel collaborated to use art in the teaching of subjects ranging from biology to music (see Glesne, 2012, 2013). I draw upon some of that effort in this book.

From these varied experiences and through insights of others, I have become particularly sensitive to and interested in interactions and relationships between researchers and study participants. I readily acknowledge inquiry purposes that do not focus on serving research participants, but I am personally inclined toward research that contributes to the lives of participants as determined by them, and that perspective will be evident as you continue to read.

This book focuses on approaches to qualitative research primarily within interpretive traditions—with frequent references to challenges to and quandaries within interpretivism. A quotation from *The Tao of Painting* represents my perspective on learning to do qualitative inquiry:

Some set great value on method, while others pride themselves on dispensing with method. To be without method is deplorable, but to depend on method entirely is worse. You must first learn to observe the rules faithfully; afterwards, modify them according to your intelligence and capacity. (Sze & Wang, 1701/1963, p. 17)

Learning to do qualitative research is like learning to paint. Study the masters, learn techniques and methods, practice them faithfully, and then revise and adapt them to your own persuasions when you know enough to describe the work of those who have influenced you and the ways in which your modifications create new possibilities.

SEARCHING

Dictionaries define research as a careful and diligent search. We have all been engaged in a variety of careful and diligent searches without necessarily labeling the process research, let alone a particular type of research. My mother's interest in her family's genealogy is one example of searching. In her pursuits to develop the family tree, she asked questions of great aunts and second cousins; requested that they and other relatives share letters and photo albums; wandered in cemeteries in towns where ancestors had lived; and sent for documents from hospitals, town clerks, and churches. From these sources, she carefully and diligently traced her ancestral history, recording both the dates of significant events (births, marriages, deaths) and the stories she heard (such as of Thomas Pettit, who, in the early 1600s, became a Bostonian "freethinker" and was whipped and "kept in hould" by local Puritans until able to join Anne Hutchison sympathizers and move further west).

As students some of you may have conducted searches without having been assigned to do so. For example, a group of undergraduates living in a residence hall became increasingly dissatisfied with the selection of food provided by the food service. They complained, but nothing changed. Over a particularly unsatisfactory meal, they decided to develop a survey that took shape as a series of statements followed by a five-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. They typed it up, discussed it at a hall meeting, and got the resident hall adviser to make copies, which were distributed via mailboxes. Respondents were asked to deposit the survey in a designated box by a certain date. On that date, the students collected the surveys and tallied the numbers, learning what proportion of residents responded and how those residents felt about certain aspects of the food service. Armed with numbers, they created a written summary and sent it to the school newspaper, the university president, and the food service.

As professionals, you may have continued to conduct searches. A middle school English teacher was struck each September by a pattern of frightened, uncertain new students. She had a hunch that teachers, administrators, and older students could do something to ease the transition but was not sure what. So she asked her sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade classes to write essays about how they felt during their first few days as sixth-graders, what made the experience good, what made the experience bad, and what could be changed to make it better. Then, working with the students, the teacher prepared a report for presentation to staff and administration, suggesting steps that the school could take to welcome sixth-graders into middle school.

In all three of these examples, people were engaged in research. They deliberately set out to collect data for specified purposes. In all three cases, data might have been collected more carefully, but the point is that people carry out research of all sorts in their everyday lives—even though they may not name the methods they use or be aware of how to improve the process so the results are more trustworthy or of greater use. This book is meant to help you approach qualitative research in ways that are thoughtful and useful.

Some of you may have been conditioned to think of research as a process that uses an instrument such as a survey, involves a large number of people, and is analyzed by reducing data to numbers. This mode of inquiry, as demonstrated by the food survey, uses *quantitative* research methods. The middle school example and parts of the genealogical search show the researcher gathering words by talking with a small number of people, collecting a variety of documents, and, in the middle school example, observing behavior. Both of these cases use *qualitative* approaches.

The two modes of inquiry are frequently contrasted. Quantitative and qualitative researchers, however, use similar elements in their work. They state a purpose, pose a problem or raise a question, define a research population, select research methods, develop a time frame, collect and analyze data, and present outcomes. They also rely (explicitly or implicitly) on theory and are concerned with rigor. Nonetheless, how researchers go about putting these elements together makes for distinctive differences in the research processes and products as discussed in the next section on research paradigms.

WAYS OF KNOWING: PARADIGMS OF RESEARCH

Paradigms are frameworks that function as maps or guides for scientific communities, determining important problems or issues for its members to address and defining acceptable theories or explanations, methods, and techniques to solve defined problems.

(R. Usher, 1996, p. 15)

The concept of research paradigms grew out of work by Thomas Kuhn, who published *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in 1962. Kuhn, trained as a theoretical physicist, had a strong interest in philosophy. While a doctoral candidate, he became intrigued by how history informed the philosophy of science (Loving, 1997). The book that resulted from this exploration began a philosophical revolution in the practice of science. Before its publication, Western scientists tended to believe that research built upon itself, progressively increasing a body of knowledge. Referred to as **logical positivism**, this paradigm held that knowledge was “limited to what could be logically deduced from theory, operationally measured, and empirically replicated” (Patton, 2002, p. 92). Although science, at the time, was viewed as objective, neutral, and value-free, Kuhn demonstrated how science was often an ideological battleground where ideas and explanations competed, and those that won tended to be those of the scientists with the most power (economically, politically, socially, etc.). From Kuhn and others came the argument that “data and observations are theory-led, that theory is paradigm-led, and that paradigms are historically and culturally located” (R. Usher, 1996, p. 16).

A **paradigm**, then, is a framework or philosophy of science that makes assumptions about the nature of reality and truth, the kinds of questions to explore, and how to go about doing so. The word **ontology** is often used to refer to beliefs regarding reality or what kinds of things make up the world. “Ontology,” states Potter (1996), “is the concern about whether the world exists, and if so, in what form” (p. 36). You might think of the world as one of matter, for example, things you can observe and measure. Or you might see the world as more shaped by the mind, by how the mind perceives, categorizes, and interprets things. What you believe about the nature of reality, in turn, affects the kinds of questions you ask of it, what you consider knowledge to be. **Epistemology** is the word used to refer to the study of the nature of knowledge. What you believe knowledge to be, in turn, shapes and serves to justify your methodology, your theoretical perspectives about how to go about knowing.

Every research study, therefore, is informed by philosophical and theoretical assumptions, even though researchers sometimes are not aware of these influences because they are embedded in the researchers’ suppositions about the nature of reality and knowledge. Part of your duty as a researcher is to figure out what philosophical and theoretical perspectives inform the kind of work you choose to do (see Figure 1.1). This introduction is meant to initiate that process, but it is only a beginning. Some sources to help you become more familiar with the thought and language of philosophical and theoretical perspectives that inform research are suggested at the end of this chapter.

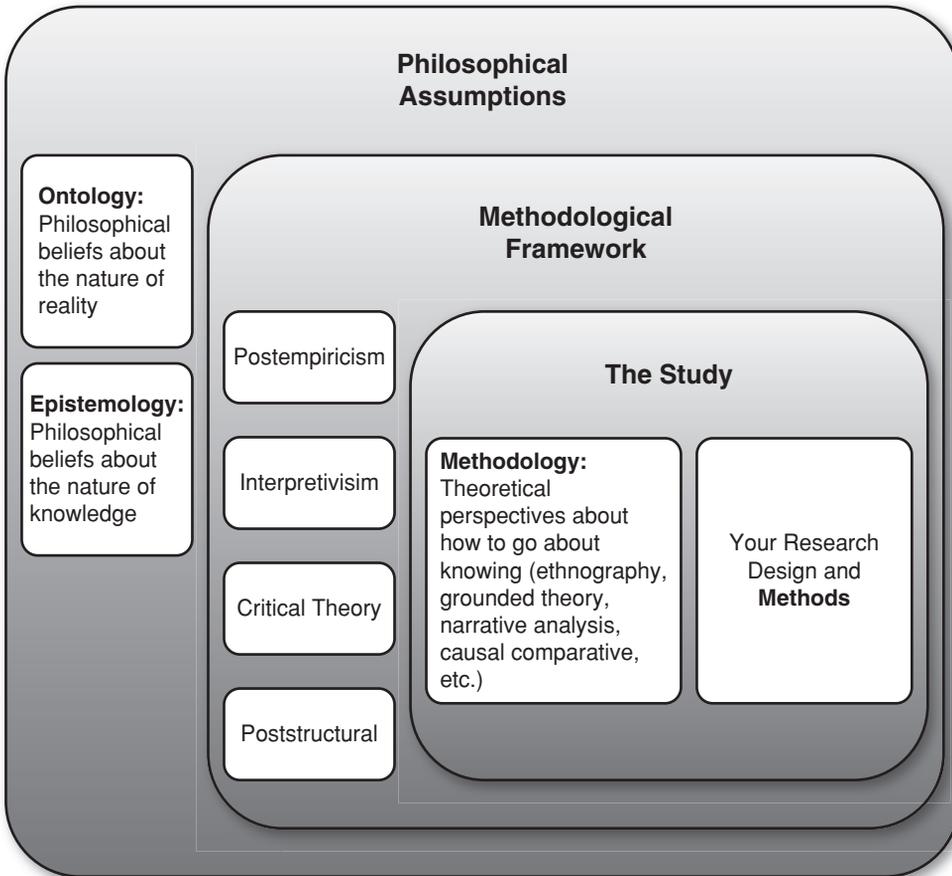


FIGURE 1.1 Foundations of a Study

For ease of discussion, I classify the philosophical frameworks that guide the work of social scientists into four paradigmatic families: postempiricism, interpretivism, critical theory, and poststructuralism. Each should be viewed as loosely bounded and as containing several related schools of thought. They are not rigid, well-defined categories. These paradigms have developed and changed over time, influenced by sociohistorical contexts as well as by thought of scholars from within their own traditions and from other paradigms. To complicate matters, different researchers and authors use different labels for the paradigms, and some labels get associated with various paradigms. Nor is there agreement among social scientists on how many paradigms there are or on how associated methodologies should be divided. My purpose in using the categories proposed here is as a heuristic for making clearer the ways in which research is ensconced in belief systems that offer different purposes for doing research and different ways of making meaning.

As you reflect upon the various paradigms described in the sections to follow, you may find it useful to refer to Table 1.1, which illustrates the purposes and methodologies or analyses associated with various paradigms. Aspects of this table were informed by the work of Patti Lather and Elizabeth St. Pierre (Lather, 2007, p. 164).

Logical Positivism/Logical Empiricism and Postempiricism

Empiricism developed and flourished with the Renaissance (1450–1600), as a response, in part, to the power of religion during the Middle Ages. Rather than explanations based on religious texts, the empiricists believe they could explain

TABLE 1.1 Paradigms, Purposes, and Methodologies/Analyses

PARADIGM*	OTHER TERMS OR LABELS	ASSOCIATED THEORISTS OR PHILOSOPHERS	CENTRAL RESEARCH PURPOSE	ASSOCIATED RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES OR ANALYSES
Positivism	Logical empiricism Postpositivism** Postempiricism	August Comte	Predict	Experimental Quasi-experimental Causal comparative
Interpretivism	Constructivism Naturalism Phenomenological Hermeneutical	Clifford Geertz Jurgen Habermas Edmund Husserl Immanuel Kant George Herbert Mead	Understand	Ethnography Phenomenology Symbolic interactionism Narrative analysis Grounded theory
Critical Theory	Feminist theory Critical race theory	Karl Marx Antonio Gramsci Max Weber Herbert Marcuse Luce Irigaray	Emancipate	Critical ethnography Feminist research Participatory action research (Freire) Critical discourse analysis
Poststructuralism	Postmodernism Postcolonialism Post-Fordist	Michel Foucault Jacques Derrida Jean F. Lyotard Gayatri Spivak Edward Said Arjun Appadurai Homi K. Bhabha	Deconstruct	Deconstruction (Derrida) Genealogy (Nietzsche, Foucault) Rhizoanalysis (Deleuze, Guattari) Paralogic legitimation (Lyotard)

*Term frequently used to describe the family of philosophical frameworks.

***Postpositivism* is used by some to refer to a less strict form of positivism, and by others to refer to anything other than the early form of positivism. In the latter use of the term, all the paradigms other than early positivism would be forms of postpositivist thought.

the world and find truth through observations and experimentation. During the Age of Enlightenment (1600–1800), empiricism became viewed as *the* way to do research, contributing to rapid expansion of knowledge in the physical and natural sciences in Europe.

The term *positivism* came from Auguste Comte, a nineteenth-century French philosopher, who advocated modeling research in the social sciences on that used in the natural sciences to create an approach that “would be *positive* in its attempts to achieve reliable, concrete knowledge on which we could act to change the social world for the better” (O’Reilly, 2005, p. 45). Social scientists from many disciplines applied positivist methods and concepts (such as validity, reliability, objectivity, and generalizability) to their research. By the 1930s and 1940s, however, the ontology on which logical positivism was built—that a fixed reality existed that could be measured and known—had received much criticism. Most who work within this paradigm today would agree that the world is not knowable with certainty, and they accept that measurement is fallible. They also grant that complete objectivity is not possible and that all researchers are biased by their historical contexts and sociocultural experiences. Nonetheless, they continue to use and value procedures and language associated with the scientific method and to assert that research can reveal close enough objective facts to assist in making generalizations and predictions regarding social behavior. This modification of positivism is sometimes referred to as *postpositivism*. The term **postpositivism** is used by others to indicate all paradigmatic frameworks that have developed since logical positivism held sway. To avoid this confusion, I am using *postempiricism* to refer to the modified way of viewing science and inquiry that came after “the demise of the strict *empiricism of logical positivism*” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 233).

As a postempiricist, your ontological beliefs will include a reality external to people that can be measured and apprehended to some degree of accuracy. Because the world is at least approximately knowable, you will seek to do research in order to make generalizations about social phenomena, to provide explanations about their causes, and to create predictions concerning those phenomena. You will work to gain this knowledge through observations that are as objective as possible, measurements, and carefully designed experiments. Your research methods generally will begin with a theory about the phenomena in question. Using that theory, you will pose several hypotheses and then test your hypotheses through methods designed to be objective and to keep you removed from subjects to avoid, as much as possible, your influencing their behavior and responses. The data you collect will be reduced to numerical indices or quantifiable bits of information and will be analyzed statistically. These procedures tend to be called **quantitative methods**.

Interpretivism

Although ideas found in interpretivism can be traced back to Greek and Roman philosophies, interpretivism as a form of social science research grew out of the work of eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant and was

expanded on by Wilhelm Dilthey, Max Weber, Edmund Husserl, and others. These philosophers are referred to as **idealists** in that, unlike **realists**, who believe a world exists independently of the knower, *idealists* believe that the world cannot exist independently of the mind—or of *ideas*. “An idealist does not necessarily hold that the natural and social worlds are unreal or nonexistent, but that there is . . . no direct understanding of the world” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 143). Rather, the world must be interpreted. This interpretive theory of human understanding is sometimes referred to as *hermeneutics*. It rejects the idea of universal laws and accepts that interpretation is fundamental to human interactions and knowing (Schwandt, 2007). The role of the social scientist then becomes accessing others’ interpretations of some social phenomenon and of interpreting, themselves, other’s actions and intentions.

Many different traditions of interpretivism have developed. German Edmund Husserl, for example, elaborated on the philosophies of Immanuel Kant to develop his philosophy of *phenomenology*. In the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, other prominent thinkers, such as Alfred Schutz, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and George Herbert Mead, further developed phenomenological theory. As the ideas of interpretivism took hold in different disciplines and in various geographic locations, they grew and developed in ways that met diverse needs and interests. For example, *ethnomethodology* and *symbolic interactionism* grew as methodologies in sociology for interpreting aspects of everyday life while, in anthropology, *ethnography* developed as the way of understanding and interpreting culture. All, however, share the goal of understanding human ideas, actions, and interactions in specific contexts or in terms of the wider culture.

The ontological belief that tends to accompany interpretive traditions, therefore, portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing. What is of importance to know is how people interpret and make meaning of some object, event, action, perception, and so on. These constructed realities are viewed as existing, however, not only in the mind of the individual, but also as **social constructions**, in that individualistic perspectives interact with the thought and language of the wider society. Thus, accessing the perspectives of several members of the same social group about some phenomena can suggest some cultural patterns of thought and action for that group as a whole.

With the research goal of interpreting the social world from the perspectives of those who are actors in that world, it follows that the research methods include interacting with people in their social contexts and talking with them about their perceptions. If your philosophical framework is interpretivism, your study design will tend to focus on in-depth, long-term interactions with relevant people in one or several sites. Although site-specific hypotheses may be a result of your study, you probably will begin not with them, but with a mind-set that is exploratory and open to the variety of perspectives and issues that might arise. You observe, ask questions, and interact with research participants. You may look for patterns in your analyses, but you do not try to reduce the multiple interpretations to numbers, nor to a norm. Your final write-up will be quite descriptive in nature. These methods tend to be called **qualitative**.

Because some of you may be more familiar with postempiricist traditions of research and are trying to figure out exactly how interpretive traditions differ, I have included Figure 1.2. The differences suggested should be taken not as hard-and-fast distinctions but as predispositions of the different inquiry approaches.

Critical Theory

Critical theory research takes you beyond describing “what is,” which is the intention of interpretivists, and toward describing “what could be” (Thomas, 1993). In critical theory, the term *critical* refers to “the detecting and unmasking of beliefs and practices that limit human freedom, justice, and democracy” (R. Usher, 1996, p. 22). Critical theory research critiques historical and structural conditions of oppression and seeks transformation of those conditions.

POSTEMPIRICAL APPROACH	INTERPRETIVE APPROACH
<p><i>Assumptions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Social facts have an objective reality ■ Variables can be identified and relationships measured to some extent of accuracy <p><i>Research Purposes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Generalizability ■ Causal explanations ■ Prediction <p><i>Research Approach</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Begins with hypotheses and theory ■ Uses formal instruments ■ Experimental ■ Deductive ■ Component analysis ■ Seeks the norm ■ Reduces data to numerical indices ■ Uses abstract language in write-up <p><i>Researcher Role</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Detachment ■ Objective portrayal 	<p><i>Assumptions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Reality is socially constructed ■ Variables are complex, interwoven, and difficult to measure <p><i>Research Purposes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Contextualization ■ Understanding ■ Interpretation <p><i>Research Approach</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ May result in hypotheses and theory ■ Researcher as instrument ■ Naturalistic ■ Inductive ■ Searches for patterns ■ Seeks pluralism, complexity ■ Makes minor use of numerical indices ■ Descriptive write-up <p><i>Researcher Role</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Personal involvement ■ Empathic understanding

FIGURE 1.2 Predispositions of Postempirical and Interpretive Approaches to Research

Critical theory research is guided by a *historical realism* ontology: that life is a “virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values crystallized over time” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 168). A central concept in critical theory research is that ideologies work to distort reality. The role of critical theorists is to reveal and critique these distorting ideologies and the associated structures, mechanisms, and processes that help to keep them in place (Prasad, 2005). In particular, they work to situate the experiences and perspectives of the oppressed group in a social, historical context, revealing how conditions serve certain groups and not others. See Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith (2008) for numerous examples.

Critical theory researchers often make use of (and make others aware of) *standpoint epistemologies*. Standpoint epistemologies are positioned in the experiences, values, and interests of a group that has traditionally been oppressed or excluded (women, gays, lesbians, people of color, the colonized, etc.). From those standpoints, researchers critique and reconstruct narratives of dominant groups, exposing ways in which they have been racist, masculinist, straight, Eurocentric, and so forth (Schwandt, 2007). Two examples of standpoint epistemologies are critical race theory and queer theory. **Critical race theory** focuses on ways in which racism is so embedded in society that it appears normal for many, and it portrays race as a socially constructed means to identify and classify people. With emphasis on social and political forms of power, critical race theory looks at how power both includes and excludes people of color (Madison, 2012; Schram, 2006). **Queer theory** challenges the concept of heteronormativity, the perspective that heterosexuality is/should be the normal (and legal) way for interactions. Similar to the treatment of the concept of race in critical race theory, queer theory views heterosexuality as a social construct and works to bring under suspicion any views considered “normal” by dominant society (Madison, 2012).

Although critical theory research does not follow any particular set of methods, a few general aspects of research design are characteristic:

- Critical theory researchers see research as a political act because it not only relies on values systems but challenges value systems (R. Usher, 1996). Critical theory research tends to focus on issues of power and domination and to advocate understanding from the perspective of the exploited and oppressed.
- Critical theory researchers often focus upon language or the “tacit rules that regulate what can and cannot be said, who can speak with the blessings of authority and who must listen, whose social constructions are valid and whose are erroneous and unimportant” (Kinchelov & McLaren, 2000, p. 284). As a result, their interests lie in exposing ways in which discourses are socially and historically constructed and how these discourses support and maintain conditions of inequality, oppression, and exploitation.
- Critical theory researchers are often interested in **praxis**, or the relationships between thought and action, theory and practice. Some incorporate dialog

and critical reflection as part of the research process in an effort to reveal unexamined assumptions among participants and the ways in which people may be accepting explanations of the dominant cultural group that serve to oppress. This process “enables people to challenge learned restrictions, compulsions or dictates of habit” (Higgs, 2001, p. 49) and can point the way to changing current relationships or structures.

Weis and Fine (2004) provide engaging examples of the possibilities associated with critical research. They demonstrate how research can go beyond description to reveal ways in which certain groups are subjugated, and then to raise awareness among participants in those processes. In one of their studies, Weis and Fine created “research camps” for New York City high school students from a variety of identities (racial, class, gender, ethnic, etc.). In the camps, students learned about critical race theory as well as research methods. The students created a school survey, administered it, and then analyzed and interpreted the data. Using critical race theory, Weis and Fine urged students to look at ways in which dominant perspectives were perpetuated through their own analyses, and at how certain groups got silenced in the process. For many of the students, the work was empowering as they gained authority and confidence to speak out about school inequities and societal injustice.

Feminist theory can guide research in each of the paradigms, but feminist research is often allied with critical theory research. An underlying assumption in critical feminist work is the belief that women experience oppression and exploitation, and that this experience varies, considering the multiple identities each person holds (Maguire, 1996). Like critical theory researchers in general, critical feminist researchers focus on issues of justice and power and are committed to uncovering and understanding the forces that cause and sustain oppression (Maguire, 1996). They hold as a primary focus of their work the transformation of asymmetrical power relations, particularly as applied to women. This does not mean, however, that the focus is exclusively on gender, because “gender oppression is not experienced or structured in isolation from other oppressions” (Maguire, 1996, p. 108). Rather, women’s identities are understood as *intersectional* (McCall, 2005), making it imperative that consideration and analysis of race, class, culture, ethnicity, sexual preference, and other identities play a primary role in feminist research.

Beginning with the topic for research, the feminist position is that research with women must first ask research questions that are of interest and importance to women (Bloom, 1998). Second, “the most critical components of feminist methodology and perhaps its most distinguishing features are the concern for the research relationship and the enlargement of the definition of rapport in the fieldwork process” (Bloom, 1998, p. 150). The feminist researcher acknowledges that a relationship exists with each participant in a study and works to honor those relationships. Third, feminist researchers advocate critical self-reflections on their own roles as researchers and on their histories, values, and assumptions in

relationship to the research. Feminist researchers extend their attention to interactions among researcher and participants and to the role power and authority might play in the research process. Fourth, feminist researchers tend to position themselves in the inquiry process as activist scholars, committing themselves to using their privileged positions and research for social justice ends, particularly on behalf of those most disadvantaged (Bloom & Sawin, 2009).

Feminist research has made lasting changes in how qualitative inquiry in general is conducted. Because feminist researchers sought to create less hierarchical and collaborative research relationships, researchers in other paradigms revised their perspectives on ways to be with research participants and began asking new questions about how the nature of research relationships affected inquiry. The focus by feminists on interrogating their own actions, interactions, power, and authority in the research process has also contributed to general discussions of reflexivity in research and its expected incorporation into most forms of qualitative inquiry (see Chapter 5 for more discussion on this topic).

To complicate matters and also to reiterate that these paradigmatic categorizations leak into each other and are not static, “many contemporary critical and feminist scholars have moved in the direction of poststructuralist thinking in their work” (Hatch, 2002, p. 17). Just what this may mean is discussed in the next section.

Postmodernism/Postcolonialism/Poststructuralism

When we white Western males can no longer define the truth we claim there is no truth.

(Bruner, 1993, p. 23)

Every time research is done a piece of my culture is erased.

(Aboriginal quoted in Dunbar, 2008, p. 91)

The term **postmodernity** indicates a break from modernity, a historical period of time marked, in part, by industrialization. Characteristics of modernity included a belief in formal logic as necessary for reason, the bureaucratization of society, and a belief in science and technology as means to solving problems (Harker, 1993). Postmodernity is marked by globalization, the spread of information technologies, and the fragmentation of nation-states. Under **postmodernism**, the grand theories that have been relied upon as explaining how societies work and how people develop and interact are subjected to critique and distrust (Schwandt, 1997, p. 120), mostly because as Sokolowski (2000) states, “It has become more and more clear that the heart of the modern project is not the exercise of reason in the service of knowledge, but the exercise of a will, the will to rule, the will to power” (p. 202). “Postmodernism argues that there are no universal truths to be discovered, because all human investigators are grounded in human society and can only produce partial locally and historically specific insights” (Delamont, 2002, p. 157). Rather than questions about

causality, as with postempiricists, or meaning, as with interpretivists, concepts that are relevant to postmodernism include plurality, fragmentation, and indeterminacy (Prasad, 2005).

The paradigm of inquiry that is informed by postmodern thought is variably referred to as *postmodern*, *poststructural*, *postcolonial*, and *post-Fordist*, among other terms. These traditions can be distinguished from each other and yet share similar perspectives or philosophies, and the terms are used, therefore, somewhat interchangeably by many. Researchers within these traditions “offer a radical critique of the entire fabric of modern Western thinking from both within and outside it” (Prasad, 2005, p. 211). For each, the term *post* is more than a marker of time. It refers to a break with the past and to “the *regeneration* and *reconstellation* of new ideas and social practices” (Prasad, 2005, p. 213).

Postcolonialism theory has emerged from throughout the world—in previously colonized countries as well as in Europe and the United States. Postcolonialism is concerned with legacies of colonialism and how they work “to subjugate entire populations on basis of race and geography” (Prasad, 2005, p. 212). It focuses upon the multiple ways (language, values, customs, positions of power, borders) colonialism continues in the everyday lives of people, and how it is resisted and challenged. Postcolonialism critiques ways in which Western thinking (liberal humanism and modernist ideals) dominates lives of people throughout the world, and it works to bring the voices of the margins to the center, to displace Western hegemony. Important postcolonial scholars include Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and Arjun Appadurai, among others.

Much of the thinking regarding **poststructuralism** emerged out of French intellectual thought, particularly the work of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Reacting to the sociolinguistic work of structuralists who sought underlying linguistic codes or grammars to understand social interactions and cultures, poststructuralists were more interested in how texts resisted “order and systematization” (Prasad, 2005, p. 238). Viewing textual productions as not only written words but also speech and human behavior, poststructuralists tend to focus on deconstructing texts, showing how they systematically include and exclude people and ideas. Anything occupying a central position in a society, such as the notions of progress and liberal democracy in the United States, is suspect as discourses of control and power. The poststructuralist works to decenter and to destabilize such ways of thinking. Because these central discourses are seen as insidious, penetrating most venues of social thought, researchers must interrogate their own beliefs and actions as well: “Poststructuralism does not allow us to place the blame elsewhere, outside our own daily activities, but demands that we examine our own complicity in the maintenance of social injustice” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 484).

The central purpose of these various *post* traditions can be described as **deconstruction**. Jane Flax (1990) writes that “postmodern discourses are all deconstructive in that they seek to distance us from and make us skeptical about beliefs concerning truth, knowledge, power, the self, and language that are often taken

for granted within and serve as legitimation for contemporary Western culture” (p. 41). Elizabeth St. Pierre (2000) elaborates:

One of the most significant effects of deconstruction is that it foregrounds the idea that language does not simply point to pre-existing things and ideas but rather helps to construct them and, by extension, the world as we know it. In other words, we word the world. The “way it is” is not “natural.” We have constructed the world as it is through language and cultural practice, and we can also deconstruct and reconstruct it. (p. 483)

The artwork by Albrecht Dürer provides a visual metaphor of how assumptions and prevailing frameworks shape the work that gets done. In western Europe in the 1400s, paintings were used primarily to communicate religious stories and to pay homage to rulers and donors. Dürer was a German painter,



Albrecht Dürer (German, 1471–1528), *Lot and His Daughters*, 1496/1499, Samuel H. Kress Collection, The National Gallery of Art.

engraver, printmaker, and mathematician who lived from 1471 to 1528. Much of his work was of religious figures and scenes, as was typical of the time. Dürer was, however, at the cusp of change, when the bourgeois were becoming patrons of art along with the aristocrats and the church. These new patrons were interested in new art forms, encouraging Dürer's foray into woodcut prints and watercolor landscapes. Postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism challenge every aspect of Western philosophy and science that has developed since the Enlightenment, suggesting that, as with Dürer, we live at another cusp of change.

Mixed Methods

When you are standing within the circle of logic created by the assumptions of your paradigm, the positions taken by those working in other paradigms simply do not make sense.

(Thomas Kuhn, cited in Hatch, 2002, p. 19)

A question that arises in research discussions is whether or not you can combine approaches, usually meaning whether you can combine quantitative and qualitative research techniques within one study. To address this question, I need to clarify the terms *methodology* and *method*. **Methodology**, drawing from Schwandt's useful dictionary of qualitative inquiry terms, refers to "a theory of how inquiry should proceed. It involves analysis of the assumptions, principles, and procedures in a particular approach to inquiry" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 193). The term **method** generally refers to "a procedure, tool, or technique used . . . to generate and analyze data" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 191). If you were to attempt to combine methodologies—for example, a postempiricist methodology that relies heavily on quantitative methods such as experimental design with an interpretive methodology that relies on qualitative methods such as ethnography, you would end up doing two studies. These methodologies derive from paradigms that make different assumptions about the nature of the world and about what counts as valuable knowledge. Each requires specific procedures or methods to find the type of data needed.

If, however, you wanted to combine methods, or techniques, you could. The experimental researcher sometimes uses interviews and the ethnographer sometimes uses surveys. One method tends to be supplementary to the dominant mode of gathering data. That is, if doing ethnography, you might include a quantifiable survey in your study, but most of your methods would be qualitative. Even if you combine qualitative and quantitative methods, you tend to situate yourself within a particular research paradigm that matches your way of viewing the world.

This discussion is not meant to imply that one methodological approach cannot build upon the other. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution began with much observation, descriptive data, and inductions and was followed by more

“scientific” experiments. Nor does it preclude collaborations by researchers looking at an issue from different research paradigms and with different sets of expertise: “What is evident, however, is that the challenge facing those seeking to use different theoretical, not merely alternative methods, is to identify which can be productively brought together—for what purpose(s), in what ways, and on what scale—to explore which phenomena” (Green, Camili, & Elmore, 2006, p. xvii).

METHODOLOGY, INQUIRY QUESTIONS, AND METHODS: AN INTERACTION

This section works to demonstrate more explicitly how research philosophies and methodologies shape the kinds of research questions asked and the methods used. For comparisons, I focus on two methodologies based in interpretivism—ethnography and community-based action research—and on a methodology grounded in critical theory, critical ethnography.

In 1992–1993, I lived for eight months in Costa Rica. For much of that time, I was in a small fishing village, assisting a local environmental group. They were training young people as nature guides and working to educate national and international tourists as well as members of the broader community about the environments and cultures of the area. The organization was a grassroots group, developed by local people for local environmental efforts. It was headed by an indigenous man and drew members from all the ethnic and cultural groups in the area: African Caribbean, Indigenous, Hispanic, and European.

Through a mutual contact, I was introduced to the president of the organization to discuss possibilities of my doing research with the group. He suggested that I draft a proposal for the group’s board to discuss. The proposal was accepted, and I rented a small house in the village. With this group and within this one setting, my research could have taken a variety of forms.

I might have done conventional ethnography. After working with and hanging out with the group for a month or so, I began to see the leaders and activists of the group as “bridges” between several different cultural or value systems. In my journal, I was forming an ethnographic research statement: I wanted to understand (1) the motivations of and perceived rewards for those who give of themselves for a greater good; (2) the cultural and historical contexts that nurture or provoke such a gathering of varied, talented, committed individuals; and (3) the role of cross-cultural experiences in the philosophical orientations of the leaders/activists.

For such a study, I would have developed criteria for selection of leaders/activists, set up a series of interviews, and continued “hanging out” with the group, observing actions and interactions. To help in understanding the socio-cultural context of the leaders, I may have set up interviews with family members and significant others. Eventually, I would analyze the interview and

observation data for patterns and themes and write a descriptive account meant to contribute to the scholarly understanding of activists/leaders. But I did not do conventional ethnography, as much as those research questions interested me.

I might have done critical ethnography. Most of the inhabitants of the area were either African Caribbean or Indigenous in heritage. Although patterns of racial and ethnic oppression have taken different forms in Costa Rica than in the United States, both African Caribbean and the Indigenous encounter discrimination. While in the village, I began to hear stories about the ways outsiders (Costa Rican and foreign) were gaining access to land because the local people lacked legal title, in spite of traditional claims to the land.

I could have done research to understand local customs of land tenure and Costa Rican legislation regarding owning land. Then, I might have formed a critical ethnography research statement such as the following: I want to (1) uncover ways in which current systems of power and privilege (class, ethnicity, gender) facilitate the loss of claim to coastal and rainforest land by locals and (2) work with local groups to develop strategies to retain control over their land. Research methods might include creating dialog groups to discuss experiences with land tenure, encroachment on communal land, pressures to sell land if title is held, and possible strategies to defend rights and retain land. I would act as a group facilitator and resource person, providing information about legalities where needed. My primary intent would be to help develop strategies and raise awareness of ways to challenge the ongoing loss of land. But I did not do critical ethnography, as much as land rights issues appeared important to me.

Critical ethnography can be a kind of action research, but it is not necessarily action research. The essence of action research is the intent to change something, to solve some sort of problem, to take action. Through preliminary discussions with the environmental group, community-based action research (addressed in more detail later in this chapter) was the preferred inquiry mode. If I, with my skills as a researcher, was going to be involved with the group, they wanted me to use my abilities to help their organization in its efforts, not to do research on them for use elsewhere. And I wanted to be of use to the people with whom I was living and from whom I was learning. I described my role as that of a *volunteer researcher*.

We set up a series of meetings to discuss small-scale research projects that the board desired. I took on these projects, often in concert with another member or two of the organization. For example, as part of the educational mission of the group, they asked me to investigate the area's environmental and cultural history and diversity, paying specific attention to items that visitors often asked about, such as indigenous uses of the rain forest. Such projects allowed me to learn from others about the area and their lives, sponsored by the group's introductions. I accompanied locals as they demonstrated everyday work and hiked in the rainforest as they pointed out and discussed their relationship to specific flora and fauna. The resulting document was illustrated by a local artist and made available in both English and Spanish.

My research work did not culminate in one large project; it was an ongoing process of negotiating multiple small projects. For example, another issue the group asked assistance with was more in the realm of organizational management. They requested help in prioritizing program-related projects and managing time demands, since most members were not paid staff. After facilitating (and taking notes on) a series of discussions with the whole group, smaller groups, and individuals, I drafted a plan for the year that reflected people's interests, commitments, and possible schedules. The plan then went through several iterations with the group as a whole before being put into action.

As these examples show, inquiry can take a variety of shapes within the same context. The possibilities can feel overwhelming to someone embarking on research. Some researchers take the position that well-done research, no matter what the paradigm, methodology, or methods, can make a contribution and is a worthy enterprise. Others choose to involve themselves only in research that is developed with locals as coresearchers, addressing local concerns. Yet others have abandoned conventional fieldwork, choosing to inquire into society and culture through a focus on their own experiences, as discussed in the next section. Your charge is to figure out for yourself where you stand philosophically and politically on doing research. Your position will help you determine not only what you study but also how you design your study and what techniques or methods you employ. Because this text focuses primarily on qualitative research within the interpretivist paradigm, a bit more introduction to interpretive inquiry is presented in the remainder of this chapter.

INTERPRETIVE TRADITIONS OF QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

Novice researchers often get lost in the literature on interpretive research. It's conceptually dense, can be conceptually foreign, and has conflicting use of terminology.

(Higgs & McAllister, 2001, p. 34)

By this point, I assume you are not surprised by the preceding quotation. Researchers differentiate among various types of interpretive inquiry, but approaches are multiple and distinctions are not clear-cut. For example, you might call your research case study, conversation analysis, cognitive anthropology, discourse analysis, educational connoisseurship, ethnography, ethnomethodology, ethnoscience, grounded theory, hermeneutics, heuristic inquiry, life history, narrative analysis, oral history, phenomenology, or symbolic interactionism, among other possibilities. As suggested in Table 1.2, each approach carries with it philosophical assumptions, emphasizes certain foci (culture, language, etc.), is associated often with particular disciplines (sociology, anthropology, psychology, etc.), and tends to rely upon select methods (in-depth interviews, cross-case analyses, etc.). Nonetheless, it may be best to think of the various methodologies as orientations rather than distinct, separate categories, in that each approach primarily seeks to understand and describe social phenomena from the perspectives of the participants.

TABLE 1.2 Some Qualitative Methodologies Grouped by General Foci and Disciplines*

METHODOLOGY	MAJOR FOCI	COMMON DISCIPLINARY ASSOCIATIONS
Ethnography	Describing and interpreting patterns of behavior and culture	Anthropology Education Nursing
Narrative Research Oral History Life History	Understanding lives and cultures through stories or narratives—emphases on both content of stories and the telling	Anthropology Literary criticism Social sciences Sociology
Cognitive Anthropology Ethnoscience	Exploring how aspects of culture are reflected in language and thus organized in the mind	Anthropology Sociolinguistics
Ethnomethodology	Understanding <i>everyday</i> activities and interactions	Anthropology Education Sociology
Ethnography of Communication Microethnography Constitutive Ethnography	Examining patterns of face-to-face social interaction, both verbal and nonverbal, and how they relate to larger cultural and social organizational contexts	Anthropology Sociolinguistics Sociology
Conversation Analysis Discourse Analysis Semiotics	Studying meaning-making processes involved in social interactions through perceiving and analyzing words and actions as <i>signs</i> and <i>text</i>	Communications Psychology Sociolinguistics
Grounded Theory	Developing theory out of systematic comparative fieldwork	Nursing Sociology
Symbolic Interaction	Understanding how others learn and make meaning of symbols and actions in social settings	Philosophy Sociology
Phenomenology Heuristic Inquiry	Exploring the subjective meaning and essences of another's experience of a phenomenon	Nursing Philosophy Psychology

*Note: This should be viewed as a loose grouping. Aspects of these various approaches are often combined in studies and used in a wide variety of disciplines.

This section touches upon the history and complexity found within three interpretive methodologies: ethnography, autoethnography, and action research. The discussion does not cover all interpretive methodologies; rather, it is provided to alert you to some of the variety within the paradigm and to your need to seek out sources that can inform you on methodologies of particular use to you for the questions you desire to ask. I have chosen to highlight these three because

I reference them the most throughout the book. Brief descriptions of four other methodologies (narrative research, grounded theory, phenomenology, and case study) can be found in Appendix A. The methodological descriptions indicate ways in which research foci and purposes can differ and yet make use of many of the same methods (in-depth interviews, participant observation, document collection) discussed in this book. You may want to turn to Appendix A and to read more widely before designing your research, or you may want to gain an overview of ethnographic research methods in general and then explore some other ways to approach your research interests.

Ethnography

Sciences and their societies . . . co-constructed each other.

(Harding, 1998, p. 2)

The interpretive tradition with which I am most familiar is *ethnography*, an approach widely used in anthropology as well as in other disciplines, such as education, sociology, and nursing. Since I refer to ethnography throughout the text, I discuss it more fully than other approaches. I also provide more of a historical context for the ways in which ethnography has been and continues to be used so that you can better understand and consider critiques of ethnography at home and around the world.

Ethnography comes from the Greek *ethnos*, meaning “a people or cultural group,” and *graphein*, meaning “to describe.” *Ethnographic* literally means “to describe a people or cultural group.” Using *culture* as the theoretical framework for studying and describing a group, ethnography’s origins are associated with anthropology and, to some extent, with sociology. Although social scientists do not agree on what culture is, they do see it as the organizing principle for doing ethnography. Some, for example, focus on shared meanings within a group, while others focus on what one needs to know to behave appropriately in some context. Through long-term immersion in the field, collecting data primarily by participant observation and interviewing, the researcher develops the **thick description** (a term coined by Geertz, 1973) used for interpreting how people within a cultural group construct, share, and negotiate meaning.

Ethnography’s Historical Context. Many forms of Western science expanded and advanced through colonialism. Colonial interests, for example, led to a need for navigation knowledge, and the science of cartography developed. As colonization put explorers, bureaucrats, and settlers in contact with new diseases, the science of tropical medicine grew. Agricultural knowledge magnified with colonists’ exposure to new plants such as maize, potatoes, and sugar cane. These new sciences benefited Europeans, contributing to higher standards of living in the home countries. While colonialists appropriated some local knowledge, such as tobacco cultivation, they imposed their own ways of knowing upon the people they subjugated. As they destroyed local industries, trades, and cultural traditions, they effectively slowed the growth of non-Western sciences (Harding, 1998).

Throughout the colonial period, explorers, missionaries, and colonial administrators wrote reports and descriptions of the people they encountered, but they were more interested in how to best exploit the new territories and the labor of the people than in describing their ways of life. Most reports “were written from the perspective of, or by the representatives of, a conquering civilization, confident in its mission to civilize the world” (Vidich & Lyman, 2000, p. 41).

During the later part of the Victorian era (late 1800s), anthropology developed as a discipline. In this *armchair anthropology* period, scholars compiled descriptions of people’s cultures through information from colonial reports, missionaries, and adventurer-scholars. Influenced by Darwin’s publication of *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, these early anthropologists tended to embrace a theory of *social evolution*. This theory posited a continuum of societal development from “primitive” to “civilized.” Guided by this theory, many anthropologists sought to collect and compare cultural information in order to determine indicators for placing people and their societies at different stages along a societal development continuum. Unsurprisingly, Europe was the standard for “civilization” and this anthropological “science” was often used to further racist, Eurocentric causes (Vidich & Lyman, 2000).

The Classic Anthropology period began in the 1920s, after Bronislaw Malinowski carried out long-term fieldwork (which he called “ethnography”) in New Guinea and the Trobriand Islands between 1914 and 1918. Fieldwork soon became associated with anthropological research. Major scholars of the early part of this period include A. L. Kroeber, Margaret Mead, and Ruth Benedict in the United States and Malinowski and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown in England. Since much of the world was colonized in the first half of the twentieth century, the work of anthropologists was bound up with the colonial enterprise, as young people from Europe and the United States set off to study “natives” or “tribals,” often in areas of the world remote to them. Their attitudes toward the role of colonialism, however, varied widely. Some of the classical anthropologists supported cultural and political self-determination, while others saw assimilation as the direction of the inevitable future if those who had been colonized hoped to survive in a modernizing world. Although a number of horror stories can be told of anthropology’s role in colonization, the contributions of some anthropologists in refuting racist theories, in affirming non-Western values, and in opposing Western national development models should be recognized as well (Benthall, 1995).

By the end of World War II and the cessation of overt colonial control in much of the world, anthropologists had abandoned the theory of social evolution. The discipline suffered, however, from a collective guilt over its connection to colonialism. Because of this guilt and, most likely, because of less ease of access to ex-colonial countries, many anthropologists began studying in their own countries, often looking for the “exotic” or “marginal” in their own societies, as a group of sociologists from the University of Chicago were already doing.

Referred to as the *Chicago School*, these sociologists from the University of Chicago undertook what they simply called **fieldwork** (Tesch, 1990). Influenced by British social anthropology, they began applying participant-observation techniques to the study of groups within their own communities. Robert Park and Ernest Burgess were two of the influential sociologists guiding the Chicago

School movement, which attracted a number of young sociologists between 1920 and 1960. Viewing Chicago as their laboratory, these young sociologists conducted urban fieldwork focused on individuals, groups, and organizations and wrote ethnographic texts now considered classics, including *The Hobo* (Anderson, 1923), *The Taxi-Dance Hall* (Cressey, 1932/2008), *The Jack Roller* (Shaw, 1930/1966), and *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (Zorbaugh, 1929/1983).

Current Ethnography. The social context and times have changed for ethnographers, and who the ethnographers are has also changed (Tedlock, 2000). Rather than men, many ethnographers tend to be women; rather than from primarily privileged classes, they come from different socioeconomic, ethnic, gay and lesbian, and non-Western groups. Along with the diversity in researchers, the reasons for doing ethnography are many. The conversations and challenges within anthropology, particularly in addressing its historical associations with colonialism, have contributed to critiques, new thoughts, and new practices within interpretive, critical, and poststructural paradigms. For example, former subjects of colonization not only have taken issue with what had been written about their cultures but also have become ethnographers, revealing assumptions of the “outsider” ethnographer and highlighting issues of interpretation and representation. Anthropologists and ethnographers have been at the forefront of discussions about how representations are all fictions of sorts, being influenced by the experiences and theoretical lenses of the authors, the conventions of scholarly rhetoric, the types of field relationships, and so forth.

Perhaps because ethnography was one of the early qualitative research methodologies, the methods of participant observation and in-depth interviewing are often referred to as ethnographic field methods whether or not one is doing ethnography. I tend to adopt this broad-brush use of the term. Throughout the book, I use *ethnographic* somewhat interchangeably with *qualitative* to refer to practices that seek to interpret people’s constructions of reality and identify uniqueness and patterns in their perspectives and behaviors.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography can be considered a kind of narrative research. I highlight it here because of increasing interest in it as a methodology. The term **autoethnography** has been used in a variety of ways over time: to describe narratives of a culture or ethnic group produced by members of that culture or ethnic group; to describe the ethnography of the “other,” but one where the writer interjects personal experience into the text; and, more akin to autobiography, to investigate the self within a social context, whether it be one’s own or that of another culture (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Here, *autoethnography* is used to refer to the kind of writing that inquires into the self as part of a sociocultural context.

Autoethnography begins with the self, the personal biography. Grounding the work in narratives of the self, the researcher goes on to say something about the larger cultural setting and scholarly discourse, taking a sociological rather than a psychological perspective. Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (1996, 2000) have been at the forefront of autoethnography, creating texts individually and

together and encouraging others to delve into their own lives to explore sociocultural milieus. An aspect that tends to distinguish autoethnography from some other interpretive methodologies is the use of literary techniques to dramatically portray experience. Ellis (2004) even wrote an autoethnography methods book in the form of a “methodological novel.”

Autoethnography is particularly effective in addressing research questions focused on personal traumas, spirituality, and epiphanies or major life markers (Leavy, 2009). Researchers have used autoethnographic techniques to explore grief, illness, oppression, personal stigmas, and so forth. The study is of oneself with data collected from extensive reliving of past events through writing them and then reflecting on those events, emotions, and reactions as an effect of or in resistance to the larger sociocultural context. Although other people may also be interviewed and documents sought out to help with remembering, the focus is on one’s own experiences (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Ellis (2009) describes her hope for the kinds of contributions autoethnography may make:

I care deeply that my stories have the potential to impact and improve social conditions. I make the case that this can happen through examining lives one at a time and encouraging voice person by person, as well as through an explicit focus on social justice or connection with an interest group, ideology, or party politics. (p. 15)

More discussion on and examples of autoethnography are included in Chapter 9.

Action Research

As discussed earlier, methodologies tend to be associated with specific research paradigms. Remember, however, that these are permeable categories. Paradigmatic thought and categorization have changed in response to historical moments and to challenges to ways of thinking about the world and knowledge. Similarly, methodologies are not stable entities, and the thinking and procedures associated with them change over time, across disciplines, and, sometimes, with locations. Thus, the same label might indicate several different ways of going about doing research, depending upon the times and/or practitioners. Action research is a good example.

Action research grew out of the work of Kurt Lewin in the mid-1900s. Although radical at the time in combining the generation of theory with action to change a social system, Lewin’s model of action research was grounded in the logical empiricist paradigm with clear separation between the researcher and the researched and with cycles of discovery, intervention, and evaluation (Bray, Lee, Smith, & Yorks, 2000; Bryant, 1996). It was used particularly in industry research to find ways to make businesses more efficient.

Action research has experienced popularity again, particularly in education, as a way to improve practice. Based in interpretivism, however, the cycles of research have evolved to observing, reflecting, and acting, using primarily qualitative interviews and observations, as well as surveys and quantifiable data

(Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Stringer, 2013). During the reflection phase, the researcher or coresearchers interpret the data and communicate the multiple viewpoints to those with a stake in the process (the **stakeholders**). This phase is followed by discussions of what actions need to be taken and then by the action phase, which involves planning, implementation, and evaluation.

In this form of action research, the researcher works with others as agents of change. Several different categories of action research exist in this more inclusive mode. Stringer (2013) elaborates on what he calls “community-based research,” which assists a group, a community, or an organization in defining a problem and better understanding the situation, and then in resolving their problems. The research process involves all major stakeholders, with the researcher acting as a facilitator who keeps the research cycles moving. Two other kinds of action research are introduced here: participatory action research and collaborative research.

Participatory action research (PAR) sounds as though it could be another term for community-based action research, and indeed, some use it this way. PAR is usually linked, however, to the theories and work of Brazilian activist and educator Paulo Freire (1970/2000). Evolving since the early 1970s, PAR is associated with critical theory in that it is action research committed to social transformation through active involvement of marginalized or disfranchised groups. Influenced by Jesuit work in liberation theology, Freire’s work included the objective of **concientization**, or consciousness-raising. Information is generated, analyzed, and reflected upon in the group in a way that helps to transform the thinking and realities of that group (Kendon, 2005). In its origins, PAR relied on visuals, since the work tended to take place with illiterate groups. Drawings and photos were used as “elicitation tools for discussion” (Gubrium & Harper, 2013, p. 32). PAR was popular throughout Latin America in the 1970s to mid-1980s and, to some extent, in the United States as well. It is enjoying a renewed popularity today, particularly as part of visual research inquiry. Chapter 3 includes more discussion of PAR and visual research.

Although derived from action research, collaborative inquiry differs in that participants work together to develop *knowledge* and *understanding* “as a catalyst for change—personal change, organizational change and large-scale social change” (Bray et al., 2000, p. 3). All participants are full partners in the research process, from shaping the question, to designing the inquiry, to gathering data, to making meaning of the data and communicating that meaning (Hatch, 2002). “Simultaneously, each participant is a co-subject—drawing on personal experience from inside and outside of the inquiry group to provide a collective pool of experience and insight for analysis and creating meaning” (Bray et al., 2000, p. 7). Because each participant is both coresearcher and cosubject, two conditions help shape the research focus: that each person has personal experience with the topic and that each is “equal relative to the others in terms of his or her ability to address the question” (Bray et al., 2000, p. 12). Research questions in collaborative inquiry thus tend to deal with some aspect of participants’ personal development or practice. Although much PAR and action research are collaborative in nature, collaborative research does not necessarily focus on issues of power or use dialogic processes, as in PAR. Both PAR and action research tend to involve some

hierarchy with one or two people, at the least, acting as facilitators. In collaborative inquiry, no one person has more authority than another.

In action research in general, when the researcher/facilitator is an outsider to the community or organization, difficulties in carrying out the research are often associated with defining the research focus, creating action groups where no formal organization exists, and knowing when and how to leave or end the research project. The problems and strengths associated with action research suggest that the concept of practitioners as researchers (e.g., teachers, nurses, social workers) who, with others in their community, investigate their own “backyard” carries much potential. Insiders who couple research theories and techniques with an action-oriented mode can develop collaborative, reflective data collecting and analysis procedures for their own practices or communities and thereby contribute to the sociopolitical context in which they dwell.

Possibilities of Qualitative Inquiry

In practice, neither research paradigms nor methodologies are as neatly segregated as they might appear from the headings in this chapter. Think of them as philosophies in dialog with each other and with prevailing intellectual and cultural thought. Each paradigm has influenced and will continue to affect the theories and approaches in other paradigms. Each has strengths, challenges, and possibilities. Since the rest of this book is ensconced within the qualitative interpretive tradition, I end this section with a list (in no particular order) of some of the possible contributions such research can offer:

- Through inquiry, you seek, interpret, and share others’ perspectives, as well as your own, on some aspect of the social condition, contributing to the multiplicity of voices and visions, and to the plurality of knowing.
- Listening until you understand the world of another person and then representing that world can be radical actions when you use inquiry to witness the stories and lives of those whose voices have been ignored or silenced.
- Your interpretations can point out significances, meanings, and critiques that, through your representation, can inspire others to perceive, value, or act in different ways.
- Seeking to interpret a context not your own can help you to better know yourself. You will more easily see your own assumptions, stereotypes, and subjectivities.
- Interpretive inquiry attunes your senses to the richness of the lives around you, to the complexities and particularities of people’s actions and words. This way of being can become part of who you are beyond your researcher self.
- Ideally, you are researching in situations where you can take on Maria Lugones’s notion of being “playful,” in that you “abandon competition and self-importance” (Madison, 2012, p. 121). Without attaching expectations, you give of yourself as you learn from those around you. In the process, you often develop meaningful relationships.

WHAT IS TO COME

After collecting data for a semester for her master's thesis, Susan, an environmental science student, stated, "I'm ready to throw the whole project out because I've come up with so many new questions. This process has blown me away. I feel like I need to go back and begin all over again." Susan is right. Only you know best what you should look for, what questions you should ask, and what methods you should use at the end of your study. The process of getting to that end, however, takes you through a terrain that eventually becomes clearer overall, while growing more dense in detail. The combination of your own inquiry, field journal, and reading of this text and others should help you to grasp the phenomenon of your research with the clearer understanding and sense of complexity that are the gifts of qualitative inquiry.

The open, emergent nature of qualitative inquiry means a lack of standardization; there are no clear criteria to package into neat research steps. The openness sets the stage for understanding as well as for an ambiguity that can engender a sometimes overwhelming sense of anxiety: "Who else should I be seeing?" "What else should I be asking?" "How can I ever assemble all of the pieces into something meaningful?" The openness allows the researcher to approach the inherent intricacies of social interaction, to honor complexity, and to respect it in its own right. As Eisner (1981) states, "To know a rose by its Latin name and yet to miss its fragrance is to miss much of the rose's meaning" (p. 9).

This chapter has introduced you to some of the philosophical and theoretical foundations of qualitative research. The chapters to come focus more on process, on some methods used in qualitative inquiry. They take you through procedures of research design, data collection, data analysis, and writing, as well as into discussions of reflexivity and ethics. As in learning to paint or swim, you will gain skills that can be enhanced only through practice. Wolcott (2009) states, "Qualitative approaches beckon because they appear natural, straight-forward, even 'obvious,' and thus easy to accomplish. Were it not for the complexity of conceptualizing a qualitative study, conducting the research, analyzing it, and writing it up, perhaps they would be" (p. 3). It is to the complexity of conceptualizing the studies that we now turn.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Historical, Theoretical, and Philosophical Introductions to Paradigms and Methodologies

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Prasad, P. (2005). *Crafting qualitative research: Working in the postpositivist traditions*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.

Willis, J. (2007). *Foundations of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Interpretivist and Applied/Action Research

Creswell, J. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pelto, P. J. (2013). *Applied ethnography: Guidelines for field research*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Stringer, E. (2013). *Action research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Critical and Feminist Qualitative Inquiry

- Hesse-Biber, S. N. (Ed.). (2007). *Handbook of feminist research: Theory and praxis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Madison, D. S. (2012). *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Thomas, J. (1993). *Doing critical ethnography*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Poststructuralist, Postcolonial Inquiry

- Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York, NY: Vintage Books. (Original work published 1975)
- Liotard, J. G. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge* (G. Bennington & B. Massumi, Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. (Original work published 1979)
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

EXERCISES

1. Broaden your understanding of critical, feminist, poststructural, and postcolonial approaches to qualitative inquiry. Individually or in small groups, read more on theories and philosophies associated with one of these approaches. Share what you learn with the class.
2. Broaden your understanding of the diversity within the interpretivist qualitative paradigm. Individually or in small groups, choose an interpretive methodology other than ethnography (such as phenomenology, narrative analysis, or symbolic interactionism) and do some reading on that approach. Share your understandings with the class.

ENDNOTE

1. Michael Quinn Patton has received a number of awards for his work in evaluation and sociology. He is author of many evaluation and research books, including *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (2002), an excellent resource and guide for qualitative research.

CHAPTER 2

Research Design and Other Prestudy Tasks: Doing What Is Good for You

Change permeated my pilot project. I changed focus, questions and sampling strategies. I changed the way I framed, worded and ordered questions, how I thought about my topic and the motivating force behind it. And I changed the theoretical lens I used to view my research, eventually changing it back again.

(Tabitha, UVM student)

In late 1999, I was planning to go to southern Mexico for a sabbatical year of research. Having taken students to Oaxaca for several years, I knew broadly *where* I wanted to do research (the state of Oaxaca), vaguely *what* (community grassroots organizing and nonformal education), and generally *how* (a collaborative undertaking). Working on a proposal helped me focus the study and to think through aspects of research design. In introducing the study, I wrote:

In *Grassroots Post-Modernism*, Esteva and Prakash (1998) urge local thinking and action. They illustrate how the strength of grassroots efforts lies in community. Their book is ultimately about how some communities in the “Two-thirds World” (a term they offer as a replacement for “Third World”) have resisted Western notions of “development” and worked to form culturally appropriate solutions to their own problems. In presenting examples from both Mexico and India, Esteva and Prakash challenge readers to examine their assumptions about the “good life” and to reconsider what it means to be “developed.”

This introduction helped me to begin to set a conceptual framework for my proposed work (fleshed out in the literature review), and also to focus in on the notion of “culturally appropriate solutions” as I struggled to create a research question based upon both my interests and those of Esteva, with whom I had been discussing research plans. I developed three questions:

1. In what ways do various grassroots projects (whether an iguana farm or the creation of school texts in indigenous languages) reflect local knowledge and customs?

2. In what ways do the decision-making processes and project implementation procedures reflect local knowledge and customs?
3. What philosophical (economic/sociopolitical) challenges do local grassroots efforts raise for dominant (Western, capitalist, individualist, etc.) ideologies?

I continued the proposal by introducing Esteva and describing how our conversations had set the stage for the work:

Esteva will be my collaborator in the sense that I am “volunteering” to work with him to do research that is of use to him and his organization. I cannot do this research without his direction and without his introduction to the various communities where I will spend time documenting grassroots efforts.

I left exactly which communities and how many undetermined. Instead, I indicated a minimum number:

Research sites will be various indigenous communities within the state of Oaxaca where grassroots organizations are involved in addressing local issues in innovative ways. Esteva and his colleagues who live and work with communities throughout southern Mexico will identify these sites. The number of sites studied will depend upon access and the amount of time needed at each site. . . . At the minimum, I expect to be involved with six different communities.

The proposal continued, describing data-gathering methods, data analysis techniques, and possible products and contributions. As I revisit the proposal, I see many ways in which the plan changed as the year unfolded. I began working with a youth group that I had met previously through Esteva and his programs for UVM students. The group was assisting other youth groups to create collaborative cash-generating projects so that the young people could stay in their home communities rather than having to migrate for work. Together we engaged in research to look at what was happening with various youth groups and to suggest ways each could be better supported. Through this work, I interacted with young people from ten different communities, and, ultimately, was able to address each of the research questions. Would this have happened anyway, without the proposal? Perhaps. Even with the proposal, however, I felt as though I were flailing around, trying to find firm research ground the first several months in Oaxaca. Without the proposal and the sense of direction it provided, I would have floundered more.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Researchers make numerous decisions before they begin fieldwork. These decisions generally are embodied in a research proposal, prepared for a thesis or dissertation committee or a funding agency. The purposes of this chapter are to alert you to the general kinds of decisions you will make as you design your research, create your proposal, and prepare to move into the field. The specific choices you make will depend upon various factors, including your methodological choice. Figure 2.1 may assist you in your consideration of prestudy tasks.

Title	Fashion a working title that gets at the heart of the study
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Research goals and purposes ■ Research statement (Create a one-sentence statement that describes your intended inquiry. Make it clear, focused, and doable. Reuse this statement in your proposal whenever you discuss your plans.) ■ Kind of study (e.g., ethnography, critical ethnography, action research) and briefly, why appropriate
Conceptual Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Relationship of study to personal experience and knowledge ■ Relationship of study to prior theory and research ■ Contributions of pilot study to your current thoughts and proposed approaches
Research Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Description of the major questions that your work seeks to understand/explore ■ Relationship of research questions to prior research and theory, your own experiences, and research purposes
Research Methods (Describe and justify each selection, making use of qualitative research texts and articles to demonstrate your familiarity with the procedures you are proposing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Description of research setting or social context ■ Discussion of type of study (grounded theory, ethnography, etc.) ■ Site and Participant Selection ■ Research Relationships (discuss what you expect your relationship with participants will be) ■ Data collection methods ■ Data analysis procedures
Validity and Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Potential threats to the study's trustworthiness ■ How you are dealing with/will deal with these threats ■ Consideration of possible ethical issues
Implications of Study (Significance and Contributions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Knowledge (What might your research contribute to knowledge or theory?) ■ Policy (How might your research contribute to policy?) ■ Practice (How might your research contribute to practice or to practitioners?) ■ Participants (How might your research give back to research participants and/or the communities of which they are a part?)
References	
Appendices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Timetable ■ Research information letter ■ Consent forms ■ Interview questions

FIGURE 2.1 Guide for Developing a Qualitative Research Proposal¹

¹This outline is meant as a guide, a possible template, not as a rigid framework.

Of course, if new to qualitative inquiry, you need to know more about research methods before writing a proposal, and that is the purpose of this book. You may therefore want to think about the information in this chapter as beginning steps to designing a pilot study and then return to the chapter again when you know more about both your topic and the research process and are ready to create the proposal for your study. A pilot study is useful for trying out many aspects of intended research. It helps you learn whether the concept of interest to you is of interest to participants. It can assist in clarifying your research statement and questions. It can begin to uncover and challenge your assumptions about the proposed topic. Finally, a pilot study is an important place to try out research methods. Developing the research proposal is therefore an iterative process. It begins with a plan that a pilot project will help to revise. Pilot studies receive more attention later in this chapter.

Start getting used to writing in your research journal now. Use it to generate and keep track of thoughts and ideas about what you want to do. Such notes are often referred to as research **memos** or memos to yourself. They are writings that you do to help you think, to produce new ideas, and to work through ideas. They are not meant for anyone other than yourself. Lots of the words you write in your research journal will not find their way into the proposal or final project, but these jottings help you get to that proposal and final project and are sometimes useful when you begin the more formal writing.

As you work on crafting your study, you will find helpful Thomas Schram's text *Conceptualizing and Proposing Qualitative Research* (2006) and Joseph Maxwell's text *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (2013). Schram's book will help you to think through theoretical and philosophical approaches and to see how these perspectives interact with the methodology and methods you choose. Maxwell's text helps you to create a well-designed study and is full of useful exercises. These books complement and extend the information you will find in this chapter.

THE RESEARCH TOPIC

The first research decision is to determine what you want to study. Unless you are working on a project conceptualized by someone else, you must figure out which issues, uncertainties, dilemmas, or paradoxes intrigue you. Your passion for your chosen topic will be a motivating factor throughout the various research procedures, some of which are intrinsically more interesting than others. You tap into your subjectivity, of which passion is a part, to find topics appropriate to your interests. The topic, however, should not be so personal that it is of little interest to anyone else, nor should it be in an area where you have major emotional worries. You must be able to distinguish the line between your passion to understand some phenomenon and your overinvolvement in personal issues that need resolution.

Distinguishing the difference between a topic for research and one for therapy is not always easy. For example, a doctoral student who was also an instructor

in a small community college was about to begin a research class when he received word that his teaching contract had not been renewed. Understandably, he was angry and disturbed. Consumed with thoughts on this matter, he wanted to interview people at his institution to develop a better understanding of why he was being dismissed. The class convinced him that such an investigation would be limited in scope, and that he was unlikely to get honest and complete answers from interviewees. In the end, he explored another interest: attitudes of prison guards toward the private tutoring of inmates, a topic that, as he gathered and analyzed his data, brimmed with fascinating possibilities for continued study.

Asking yourself how your proposed research intersects with your life history and whether you are setting out to prove something that you already believe to be true helps to test your emotional attachment to particular outcomes. Ken, an elementary school principal who had held several different principalships, wanted to investigate the relationship of job stress to administrative turnover. Reflecting on the intersection of the topic and his own life, Ken wrote:

My topic is perfect, I thought. The turnover rate for school administrators is incredible, I know the subject firsthand, I have dozens of contacts in the field, and stress is on everybody's agenda, in both the public and the private sectors.

So what's the problem? I care too passionately about the results. I desperately want the study to prove that school boards and superintendents should show some compassion for building administrators. I want taxpayers to recognize the limitations of personnel, resources, and supplies that make the job of principal so frustrating. I want parents to see that a partnership between school and home is in the best interests of the children. I want to prove that the narrow-minded bigots who persecuted, criticized, harassed, and hounded me were wrong. This is clearly no way to begin a study.

Ken wanted to justify his own experience. Although he needed to be interested in his research topic, his emotional attachment could preclude the open learner's attitude necessary for good data collection and analysis.

Emotional attachment may manifest itself in other ways. If the very thought of approaching research participants causes severe anxiety attacks, then you should ask yourself why. Debbie, a special education teacher new to her school and district, was feeling uncomfortable when designing a pilot project that involved interviewing administrators and supervisors. Finally, she realized that she was threatened by the thought of exposing herself to her bosses in her novice researcher role. She considered alternatives, shifted her focus, and set up a study that required obtaining data from teachers rather than from administrators.

Not everyone works effectively under the same conditions. If you are overly intimidated by the thought of going into the field, then consider reshaping your study in a more inviting way. Some of your intimidation may be the result of feelings or problems that you need to overcome; others may represent feelings and problems beyond your capacity to remedy. The qualitative inquiry process, by nature, is replete with anxiety-producing occasions without the researcher's unwittingly setting up more of them.

Practical issues such as time and money must also be considered. The conceived study may be appropriate in academic terms but impossible to conduct given the practical limitations. Do not begin with a topic so vast in scope that you could never reasonably afford the time or money to complete it.

Although the planned scope for a research topic should be realistic, neither too broad nor too narrow, the researcher cannot always know the ideal scope until data collection is under way. For example, Purvis (1985) originally planned historical research to look at all forms of adult education provisions for working-class women in nineteenth-century England. As she collected and examined documents, however, she realized she had to narrow her study, but how she should focus her research was unclear. Should she investigate forms of adult education provided by the middle class, or types of adult education organized by working-class women themselves? Should she look at all forms of adult education, or concentrate on specific areas? Should she limit her inquiry to education in rural areas or in urban areas, or should she address regional differences? Purvis's range of choices suggests the alternatives available as you consider a research focus; you will find good arguments for supporting many different focuses within the same general area of study. Developing the conceptual framework for your study through reading related literature and theory facilitates sharpening the focus for your research. It is part of getting started.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Preconceived ideas are pernicious in any scientific work, but foreshadowed problems are the main endowment of a scientific thinker, and these problems are first revealed to the observer by his theoretical studies.

(Malinowski, 1922, p. 9)

Distinguish between having a grip and being in the grip of existing theories.

(Schram, 2006, p. 61)

Knowledge of associated literature will help you judge whether your research plans go beyond existing findings and theories and may suggest important areas to pursue. In the past, some qualitative researchers argued against reviewing literature until after beginning data collection to prevent undue influence of the theories and research designs of others on your project. Current researchers tend to agree that literature should be read throughout the research, including a thorough search before data collection begins. This perspective acknowledges that we never enter into research as a "blank slate"; rather, we carry with us guiding theories and assumptions, even if not fully conscious of them.

Seeking Relevant Literature

Reading about the studies of others in a way that is useful to your work requires a particular frame of mind. Collect, scan, and read literature to verify that you have chosen a justifiable topic. For example, the many dissertation studies that have

investigated why parents send their children to fundamentalist Christian schools have identified and discussed a range of explanations. Another study on this topic, even in a state where no such studies have taken place, most likely would contribute little more of interest. Try to warrant your own project on the basis of what has been done and what has not been done.

Use the relevant literature to help find focus for your topic. When you find an article that applies to your area of interest, study the references carefully and seek out the ones that may inform you more. Existing studies show what is known about a general area of inquiry and what is missing. Continuing with the above example, the review of Christian school literature may suggest that little is known about the lives of adults who as children attended a fundamentalist Christian school. To what extent do they live within the boundaries of the doctrine espoused by their schools? Gaps in the literature base indicate fruitful areas to explore with the potential to contribute to the field.

Consider how the literature can help inform your research design and interview questions. Read critically and learn from the successes and failures of other researchers investigating similar phenomena. Did the researcher spend enough time interviewing each participant to obtain more than surface responses? Were the questions asked of a usefully varied group of people? What questions were not asked at all? What situations were (and were not) observed? What directions for future studies did researchers recommend?

Cast a wide net in your literature search. Do not confine yourself to your topic, nor to your discipline. If, for instance, your topic of interest is the use of French in U.S. schools near the border with Quebec, then you will want to collect literature on schooling and bilingualism in general. Delamont (1992) suggests reading for contrast. That is, if you are interested in women in science, then you might also want to read about men in predominantly female professions such as nursing to help generate questions for your study. Sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and educators often write on the same topics, but from different perspectives. Try to seek sources from all possible disciplines.

Using Theory

Hatch (2002) suggests, “As qualitative studies are designed, attention should be given to two types of theory: methodological and substantive. An exposition of methodological theory places the proposed study in a research paradigm and identifies what kind of study is being planned” (p. 38). Exploring and describing your methodological theory invariably assist in making explicit the implicit perspectives and values you hold that may affect choice of research topic and questions asked of that topic.

Substantive theory is the “theory that is used to describe and explain the phenomena to be investigated—the substance of the study” (Hatch, 2002, p. 39). Substantive theories may be at various levels of abstraction, from empirical generalizations to formal theories. *Empirical generalizations* are at a low level of abstraction and refer to outcomes from related studies (e.g., long-term effects of religious education). You might use these theories in your proposal to help

provide the rationale or to raise questions for your study, and you might use them later on to compare and contrast with findings from your own work. In contrast to empirical generalizations, *formal theory*, sometimes referred to as *general theory*, tends to “try to explain a whole class of phenomena—say, for example, delinquency, revolutions, ethnic antagonism” (Turner, 1985, p. 27). Qualitative researchers often make use of these more general theories as a broad framework for designing their study (creating the research statement, selecting sites and participants, developing interview questions, etc.) and for analyzing aspects of their findings.

In Figure 2.2, Esch (1996) demonstrates how she made use of relevant theories to help her think through what she wanted to research. Remember, however,

Rebecca Esch (1996) was interested in studying adolescent girls’ development. After describing the basis for her interest in adolescent girls, she wrote:

This interest in adolescent girls led me to an exploration of the theories which sought to describe girls’ experience of the transition from childhood to adolescence, in addition to theories outlining girls’ development, particularly as their development was believed to diverge from traditional theories of adolescent development. My research focused on the ideas of the Stone Center for Developmental Services and Studies at Wellesley College, and the Harvard Project on Women’s Psychology and Girls’ Development. Both of these groups place the experience of relationship at the center of girls’ development. This is in contrast to traditional theories of development that stress individuation and separation.

Rebecca discussed these contrasting theories of adolescent development. Then, she transitioned to literature on friendship, situating the inclusion of this literature in a perceived gap in human development theories:

My perspective is that although many girls struggle during this period, and perhaps all face the possibility of suffering some ill effects due to cultural, school, and peer pressures, many girls thrive. Thus, one goal of my research is to re-define or re-label the experience of girls’ development during this transitional period. Much of this moving away, on my part, from a crisis philosophy, has been generated by my own reflexive search through my adolescent memories, during which I can find little evidence of a similar “crisis.” . . . Thus, the question began to form, what of those of us who did not suffer a traumatic transition from childhood to adolescence? What of those of us who did not lose our voice or our sense of self? . . . In thinking about these questions I keep coming back to the idea of growth within relationship and what role my friends have played during the changes and difficulties of my life . . . I began to wonder if perhaps girls’ friendship might play an important role during this transitional period.

With this introduction and rationale, Rebecca then explored literature and theory on women’s and girls’ friendships, and their relationship to the concepts of *developing a sense of self* and *resilience*.

FIGURE 2.2 Example of Seeking Out Appropriate Theories

that while theories illuminate, they also conceal. They can be restrictive at best and misleading at worst. As Schram (2006) states, “Imposing a well-established theory on your developing inquiry may set you up with a neat and satisfying framework for your study, but it may also prematurely shut down avenues of meaningful questioning or prevent you from seeing events and relationships that don’t fit the theory” (p. 60). One way to address this potential problem is to use several different theories to help guide the study. Another is to explicitly seek the gaps between what a specific theory does and does not explain in your work and to add new propositions to the prevailing theory or to point out its contradictions or incompleteness. Mills and Bettis (2006) assert that if we constantly seek out alternative interpretations that contradict our own expectations and the theories we are using, then we “can push our analyses to more nuanced stages that go beyond what our frameworks provide us” (p. 83).

Creating a Framework for Concepts

After you have collected and read a variety of works on your topic, you usually need to write a literature review for your proposal. Creswell (2012) suggests creating a diagram as a visual picture of the literature to help organize the review and to figure out how it relates to your study. The point is that the review needs to be organized around the understandings that have come from investigating the studies and theory related to your topic. A literature review is not a summary of research projects with descriptions of one study after another but an integration of reviewed sources around particular trends, themes, and ideas—or *concepts*.

It may be useful to think about creating a **conceptual framework** for your study, rather than doing a review of literature (Schram, 2006; Maxwell, 2013). This keeps the focus on your proposed work, instead of becoming a task in which you feel the need to touch upon every study somewhat related to your work. It may also help you to think more broadly and with more focus at the same time. You think broadly about how your work fits into larger theories, studies, or significant ideas. And you think more specifically about the possible significance of what you want to research and how. By thinking about “concepts” that inform your work, you create a useful organizational schema into which you can integrate theories and perspectives from multiple disciplines and perspectives (Schram, 2006).

In qualitative inquiry, reviewing literature and theory is an ongoing process that does not end after the proposal is written. As you collect data and begin thinking analytically about it, you will realize the need to review previously unexamined literature, both substantive and theoretical. For example, before I began fieldwork in the Caribbean (Glesne, 1985), I reviewed rural development literature in addition to agricultural and educational studies and documents pertaining to the eastern Caribbean. During my time in the field, but particularly during time focused on data analysis, I began to read extensively about dependency theory, theory that grew out of Latin America and explains economic and power relationships between nation states. Dependency theory became central

to my analysis and discussion, while the rural development literature receded, used primarily as examples of the then-dominant perspective of development that I contrasted with perspectives of various Latin American scholars at the time. Regard reviewing literature in interactive terms. You learn different things from the work of others depending on what you already have learned and what you need to know. You may find yourself both dismayed and pleased to benefit later from material read earlier but overlooked because you lacked the experience to recognize it as beneficial.

This is to warn that when you have written your literature review or conceptual framework for your proposal, you have not completed a chapter of your thesis or dissertation. Literature reviewed as a prestudy task often finds its way into the final write-up, but expect to read articles, reports, and books throughout the research process. Even with these additional resources, a chapter titled, "Review of the Literature" is not necessarily appropriate in qualitative inquiry. Wolcott (1990) states that he expects his students to know the literature related to their topics, but he does not want them "to lump (dump?) it all into a chapter that remains unconnected to the rest of the study" (p. 17). He suggests incorporating literature throughout the telling of the story: "Ordinarily this calls for introducing related research toward the end of a study rather than at the beginning, except for the necessary 'nesting' of the problem in the introduction" (p. 17).

Remember also that data collection and data analysis in your pilot project will inform your literature search and conceptual framework. Do not feel as though you have to read everything before your entry into the field. Ernie was preparing to collect data on professionalization in the field of physical therapy. He reflected on his dance with literature:

First of all, I needed to define what professionalization was. Then I felt the need to read enough sociology to understand how people achieved it, which got me into the field of professional socialization. Then if you do achieve it and act it out, you are into the area of professional power and influence. After reading literature about that, I thought I needed to understand professional ethics and how that linked with the idea of the development of community. Finally, I realized that if I didn't go out to the field, I'd spend the rest of my life saying, "Next month, I'll be ready."

Being ready to go to the field is often a state of mind, affected by, but not necessarily related to, having completed the preliminaries.

RESEARCH PURPOSES

This section and the one that follows discuss *research purposes* and *research questions*. They are not the same thing. **Research purposes** address your practical and intellectual (and possibly personal) goals. **Research questions** or your **problem statement** focuses your inquiry by posing a question or set of questions that, through your study, you plan to address.



Published thirty-five years after Goya's death, this image was one from a series of prints and paintings that criticized Napoleon's war with Spain. Goya's work was a break from the convention of portraying the heroics of war. He showed the horrors, futility, and inhumanity of war, where victim and killers are anonymous and no one is a hero. As we can observe changes in artistic conventions over time, we can also observe how research conventions have changed over time, including research purposes and for whom the research is intended.

Francisco de Goya (Spanish, 1746–1828), *Y no hai remedio* (*And There's No Help for It*), etching, published 1863, Rosenwald Collection, The National Gallery of Art.

Maxwell (2013) distinguishes between personal, practical, and intellectual goals and suggests that you do so as well. Your personal goals are what motivate you to do the study. If the only personal goal you can come up with is completing a degree requirement, then you should probably rethink your study, since that goal may not be a sufficient motivating factor to take you through the work involved. Personal goals relate to personal experiences. For example, I grew up with a brother who was mentally handicapped in a time when few resources were available for him or his family. In fact, the ideology at the time (1950s) was one of hiding such “problems,” if not institutionalizing the person. This personal experience has been part of a motivating purpose in me to want to investigate difference and stigmatization in various ways. As you work to figure out your personal goals, write about what motivates you in your research journal. As you compose your proposal, such motivating factors may not only build the case for the research but also explicate why you are the appropriate person to conduct the study.

Those of you in applied fields such as education, social work, nursing, and physical therapy will probably be motivated as well by practical goals. That is, you hope that the research will help to change or accomplish something, for example, that teachers will become more aware of ways to encourage girls to like mathematics or that hospital administrators will implement a policy for a team approach to medical care. Practical goals also help to justify your research, but they are not usually outcomes that you can claim that your research will achieve. Rather, they help situate the potential significance of your work.

Your intellectual goals lend themselves to helping define your research statement or questions. “Intellectual goals . . . are focused on *understanding* something—gaining insight into what is going on and why this is happening,

or answering some question that previous research has not adequately addressed” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 28). Making sure teachers encourage girls to like mathematics is not, in itself, a researchable topic. But based on your own experiences and your reading about girls, mathematics, and teaching, you might become intrigued with, for example, the role of teacher talk in girls’ pursuit of and attitudes toward mathematics. This interest could become an intellectual goal and serve as the basis for creating a research statement.

To help you figure out your intellectual goals, think about what you want to describe, interpret, and/or explain (Schram, 2006). Descriptive purposes involve documenting day-to-day interactions or the ways in which people talk about some phenomenon. Interpretive purposes focus on understanding how things work in particular settings and how people make meaning of particular occurrences. Explanatory purposes include identifying patterns and possible relationships among behavior, settings, and phenomena.

Another purpose that has gained increased attention in qualitative research, particularly with critical and poststructural work, is the emancipatory goal with desires “to raise awareness, foster self-understanding and self-determination, and create opportunities to engage in social action and seek social justice” (Schram, 2006, p. 32). Research purposes are closely aligned with your beliefs on what counts as meaningful knowledge and how you go about knowing.

To summarize, clearly delineating research purposes sets the stage for research design in a number of ways. Determining your goals helps you focus your research statement or questions. Your research purposes help you to figure out the kind of research you need to do to achieve those purposes. If a goal is to raise consciousness among teens of how educational opportunities intersect with class and race, then you will use a different methodology than in a study seeking to document experiences of children of migrant dairy workers in a rural state. Your research purposes also help to justify your research by pointing out what is potentially significant about it. Marshall and Rossman (2011, p. 71–72) suggest thinking about the significance of a study by considering its potential contributions to knowledge, to practice and policy, and to actions that address social issues and inequities. Your research does not need to do all these things, but using these categories may help you to think about what it is you want your research to achieve and thereby to better define your research purposes. Finally, your purposes, along with your research statement, can act as a touchstone and help keep you on track when, in the midst of fieldwork, you become overwhelmed by the multiple directions you could pursue.

RESEARCH STATEMENT AND QUESTIONS

To focus your research, it helps to create, in one clear sentence, what it is that you want to describe, understand, or explain. This sentence is variably referred to as the *research statement*, *research question*, or *problem statement*. I like to think of it as a research statement with a small subset of research questions that help to

define and focus various aspects of the statement to be investigated. The research statement presents the overall intent of the study and indicates how open or closed it will be. It also helps direct procedures for research design.

Researchers often know from the beginning where they want to do research and, sometimes, with what group or groups of people. John, a middle school teacher working with an innovative teacher summer institute that invites middle school students to be discussants and participants, knew he wanted to do research with this institute. Dorianne, who taught English in an urban public school, wanted to do research with English teachers in other urban schools. Schram (2006), however, warns, “Do not confuse where you are looking (or what you are looking at) with what you are looking for” (p. 29). At the core of your research is some social phenomenon or issue.

Hilary Winchester (2005) notes that qualitative researchers tend to focus research questions on social structures and individual experiences of those structures. She poses two overarching questions that may help you form your research statement and questions:

- “What is the shape of societal structures and by what processes are they constructed, maintained, legitimized, and resisted?” (p. 5)
- “What are individuals’ experiences of places and events?” (p. 6)

Societal structures might be explored through social, cultural, economic, political, and/or environmental questions. Individuals’ experiences of places and/or events within a social structure are assumed to be varied and multiple; therefore, research statements often inquire into how social structures shape individual experiences, and how individuals create, change, or penetrate the structures that exist.

Both Rebecca’s and Ashley’s projects are drawn upon here to provide examples of research statements and questions. Rebecca focused her research on individuals’ experiences with the following research statement: “Through my research I will explore the intersection of girls’ friendship and the development of self during the transition from childhood to adolescence.”

Rebecca felt compelled to clarify this general statement with several more statements:

I hope to begin to understand what role friendship plays in girls’ developing sense of self. Further, I hope to begin to illuminate whether girls’ friendship provides a form of resilience, and/or fosters resistance for girls as they negotiate the transition from childhood to adolescence.

She then created four research questions to help guide and set boundaries for her work on girls’ friendship and the development of self:

1. How do girls describe the development of their sense of self during this transitional period?
2. What is the experience of friendship for girls during this transitional period?

3. How do girls describe their experiences during this transitional period?
 - What can be understood of a girl's world during this period with respect to family, school, peers/friends, culture, and so on?
 - How does the term *crisis* apply to this period of girls' development? Is there a more positive and proactive way to define, describe, and understand this transitional period?
4. How does an understanding of girls' development and friendships during this transitional period contribute to relational theories of development, and/or other developmental theories?

Rebecca's research questions assist in conceptualizing topical areas for interview questions as well as the need to include consideration of specific theories throughout data collection and analysis.

Ashley was working on a master's thesis in the School of Natural Resources. Her research statement took the following form: "In this research, I seek to understand how stakeholders involved with the relicensing of hydroelectric projects enter into negotiations and reach consensus concerning resource use and ecosystem protection." Ashley's research statement is an example of a qualitative study focused upon understanding a process, in this case, the process of negotiating and reaching consensus within a particular social structure. She developed four research questions to guide her work:

1. How do stakeholders enter into negotiations and what motivates and constrains them in the negotiation process?
2. What stages are involved in the process of reaching consensus?
3. How do stakeholders perceive the final agreement/outcome?
4. How does legislative context affect the stakeholders (from their perspectives) and the negotiation process?

As Ashley became satisfied that her research questions expressed what she wanted to learn, she could also perceive that her research methods would include observations, interviews, and legislative documents at the least. Note how both Rebecca's and Ashley's research questions began with *how* or *what*. Asking *in what ways* often works well, too.

Maxwell (2013, p. 5) provides a useful diagram that centers a study's research questions and then links them with two-way arrows to the research goals or purposes, the conceptual framework, research methods, and issues of validity. This diagram illustrates the importance of research statements and also indicates that they affect and are affected by other aspects of the study design. Figure 2.3 provides an example. Drawn from my study of academic art museums that was sponsored by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, the left-hand side shows the research statement and two of the four research questions. The right-hand side poses a hypothetical study involving campus art museums, but with a different research statement. The topics are similar, but the different statements and questions lead to very different research designs.

The development of a research statement and questions is an iterative process. As you design and pilot your study, you may find yourself returning to your

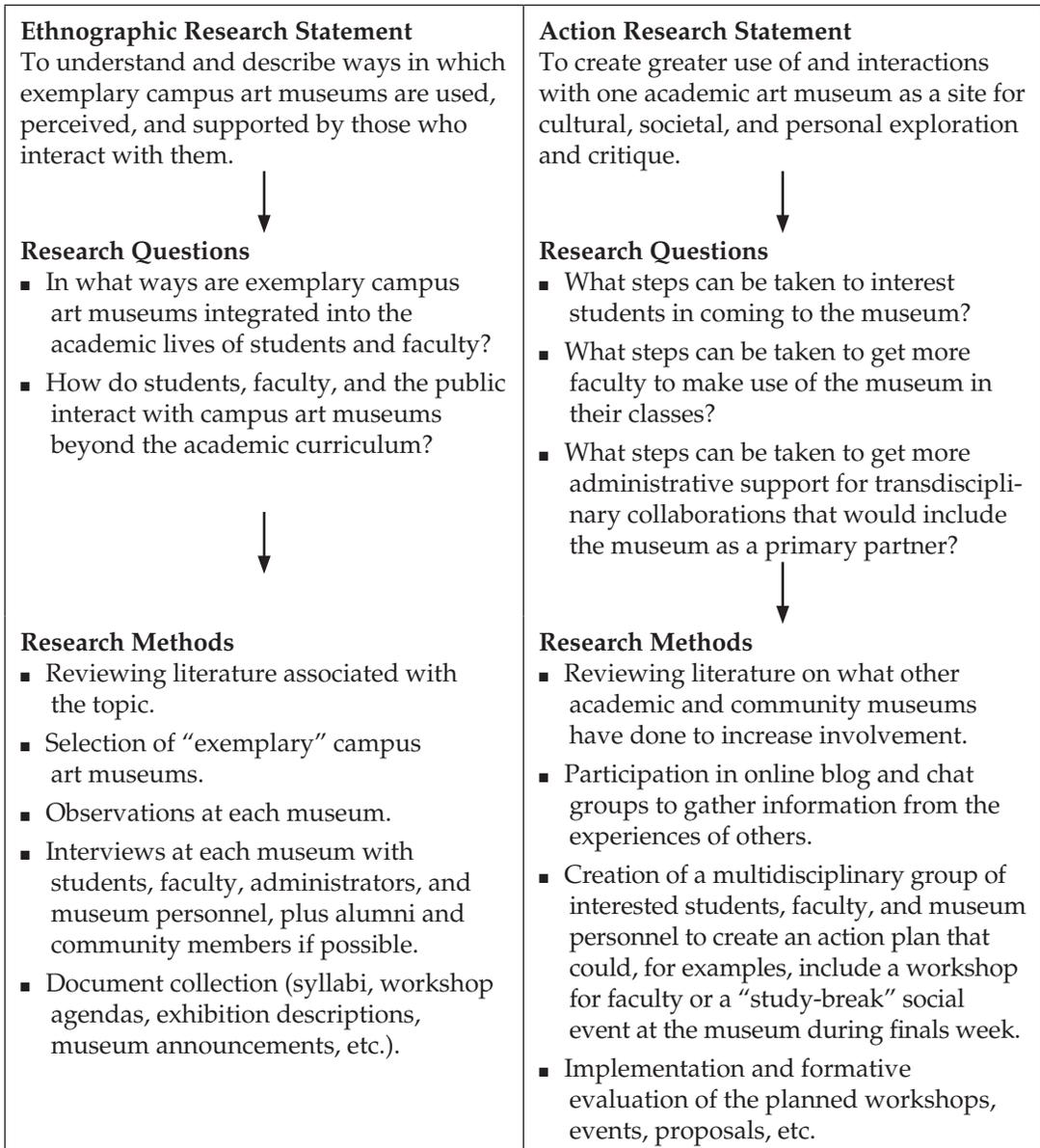


FIGURE 2.3 Linking Research Statements, Questions, and Methods

research statement and questions and redesigning them. Also note that qualitative studies are useful (1) for gaining a greater understanding of people’s experiences, perceptions, and attitudes, (2) for discovering and describing the contexts and processes involved in social structures, and (3) for generating theory. Qualitative methods are not useful for looking at discrete variables and the effects of one upon another or for making generalizations that go beyond the context of the study.

Your research statement is the fulcrum for your study. Work to create it as clearly and explicitly as you can to make sure that what you want to know is a fit with qualitative inquiry and then to help guide you to the next step of research design.

SELECTION OF RESEARCH METHODS

With your topic selected and the process of reviewing relevant literature and theories begun, you must decide what techniques or methods to use to collect data. Although researchers tend to use *collect* or *gather* when discussing the process of obtaining data, these words are not, perhaps, accurate. Dicks, Mason, Coffey, and Atkinson (2005) suggest “data recording” because data are not “simply inert materials lying around in the field, waiting for the researcher to come along and ‘collect’ them” (115). Qualitative researchers play an active role in *producing* the data they record through the questions they ask and the social interactions in which they take part, so perhaps *recording* is not the right term either because it does not convey ways in which qualitative information is co-constructed. Be aware of such problems with the language accompanying qualitative research, much of it inherited from earlier times and approaches to inquiry. I have continued using *data collection*, but I also occasionally use *data production*. See Figure 2.4 for an overview of the kinds of data often used in qualitative inquiry.

Qualitative methodologies tend to rely on more than a single method for obtaining data. This practice of using multiple methods is commonly called *triangulation*, a term taken from surveying and navigation. **Triangulation** is another contested term. In the past, qualitative researchers, influenced by logical empiricism, tended to view triangulation as a way to validate claims. The reasoning went that if you heard something from multiple sources, saw it enacted, and perhaps had a coresearcher who heard and saw it as well, then you could feel confident in claiming things were the way you were seeing and hearing them. From a

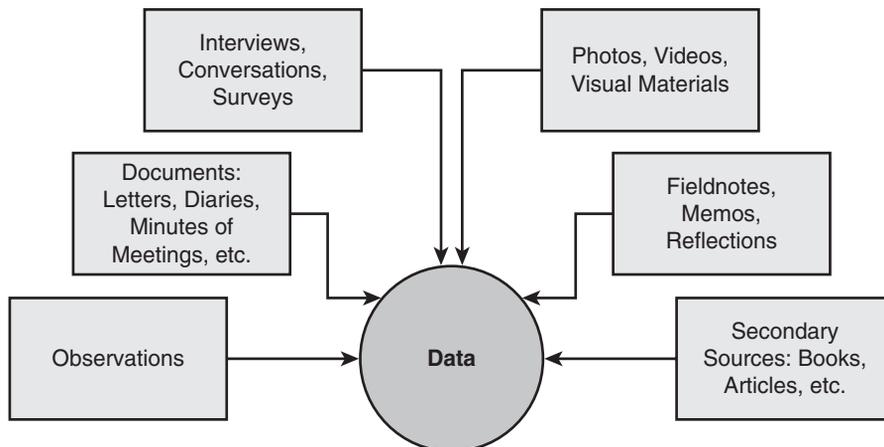


FIGURE 2.4 The Production of Qualitative Data

logical empiricist perspective, describing things as they *really* are is important. In interpretivism, however, you are not seeking to get at the *truth* of a setting or situation but trying to understand all available perspectives and their contexts.

You might be wondering, then, why researchers continue to emphasize employing more than one method for collecting data, and why triangulation remains in use by qualitative researchers. Gibbs (2007) provides two good reasons: “It is always possible to make mistakes in your interpretation and a different view on the situation can illuminate limitations or suggest which of competing versions is more likely” and, when what people say is inconsistent with what people do, “forms of data triangulation (e.g., observing actions as well as interviewing respondents) are useful . . . , not to show that informants are lying or wrong, but to reveal new dimensions of social reality where people do not always act consistently” (p. 94). Inconsistencies can help to reveal the complexity of a situation. Although using multiple data-collection methods is the most common form of triangulation, triangulation also refers to the incorporation of multiple kinds of data sources (e.g., not just teachers, but students and parents as well), multiple investigators, and multiple theoretical perspectives. Each serves to help deepen interpretations and understanding. Some researchers suggest using the term *crystallization* instead of *triangulation* to get away from associations with validity and also to “recognize that there are far more than ‘three sides’ from which to approach the world” (Richardson, 1994b, p. 522).

The data-gathering techniques used most frequently in qualitative inquiry include observations, interviews, and document collection. Within each technique, a wide variety of practices can be carried out, some more common than others. For example, when observing, some researchers use videotaping as a means to replay, slow down, and freeze observed interactions. Many, however, rely on their senses, the results of which are relayed through their pens and stored in field logs. Some researchers use props such as card sorts or pictures as stimuli for specific information in interviews. Most only ask questions.

These data-gathering techniques are discussed in later chapters; the point here is that, ideally, the qualitative researcher draws on some combination of techniques to record and construct research data, rather than on a single technique. This is not to negate the utility of a study based solely on interviews, for example, but rather to indicate that, in general, the larger the number of data-gathering methods, the richer the data and the more multidimensional the findings.

To figure out which techniques to use, once again contemplate carefully what you want to learn. Different research questions have different implications for data collection. In considering options, choose techniques that are likely to (1) elicit the data needed to gain understanding of the phenomenon in question, (2) contribute different perspectives on the issue, and (3) make effective use of the time available. In your research proposal, discuss each data production technique that you select, as Rebecca does in the following example:

1. *Interviews.* Through the use of interviews . . . I will explore each individual’s understanding and experience of friendship. . . . As highlighted in previous sections, my research, by design and by philosophy, requires the involvement

of my “others” as colearners in this study, and the development of a relationship based on trust and rapport. . . . I will engage in multiple interviews across which I and my colearners will collaboratively design, and redesign, the interview structure as we proceed. Given that our relationship will be evolving across these interviews, my hope is that the quality of the information we exchange will also evolve.

2. *Participant Observation and Document Collection.* To create an in-depth case study of each of the girls, I will not only interview them individually but also spend time with them and their friends at home, at school, and in other settings. I will bring the girls together in groups . . . for conversations about friendship, and, if possible, employ a video camera to aid me in analyzing more deeply their interactions and conversations. . . . I will encourage them to keep a journal, draw, paint, take pictures, or engage in any other medium they feel allows them full expression of their ideas. To initiate this exploration, I plan to give each girl . . . a journal upon the embarkation of our journey . . .
3. *Open-ended “Survey.”* With the *New Moon* [magazine] girls I plan to suggest the same sort of creative means of expression as I do with the case study girls. . . . I will ask them to submit a paragraph, essay, picture, photograph, collage, or other creative form that best expresses their feelings about friendship.

When you have a sense of how data will get produced for your study, you need to delineate where the inquiry will take place and who the participants will be.

SELECTION OF SITE AND PARTICIPANTS

Selection of Site

Site Selection Decisions. The selection of the research site or sites is often built into the research statement. A colleague, for example, studied what happened when a Japanese firm moved into a small, predominantly white American city. His interest grew out of yearlong negotiations that took place in several small midwestern cities before a Japanese car industry selected one as its base. He then knew where his site would be.

Some research problems do not call for a specific research site; they simply require a setting within some specified geographic boundaries. For example, a study focused on an issue concerning working single mothers who had been on welfare within the past year does not necessarily involve selecting a single study site, but travel constraints suggest limiting the selection of study participants to nearby locations. Similarly, Rebecca, with her focus on adolescent girls’ friendships and development, selected her own town as the site for observations and interviews.

Commonly, however, researchers need to develop a rationale for selecting one or more sites for data collection. Perhaps the phenomenon you wish to investigate exists to some extent everywhere. Do you choose an exemplary site or a typical site? What criteria determine exemplary, typical, or other classifiers? If you select a rural school, must you also look at an urban school? How many sites should you select? To make such decisions, you must look again at your research

interests and carefully reflect on what you want to learn. You may also need to try out, or pilot, tentative site selections.

For an example of site selection decisions, I draw upon the academic art museums study. One of our research questions asked how the works of art distributed by the Kress Foundation (the sponsor of the research) around fifty years ago had been used and what differences, if any, the gifts had made. Therefore, the potential site and participant pool began with the twenty-three academic museums that had received donations of art from the foundation. We had decided that we would learn the most from active, innovative museums, so a second research question asked, "In what ways are exemplary campus art museums integrated into the academic lives of students and faculty?" (Glesne, 2013, p. 12). The next sampling strategy therefore was to determine which of the twenty-three museums could be classified as *exemplary*, meaning, as we defined it, that they were active, innovative, and integrated across the curriculum. This could be described as "extreme case" sampling, defined as "selecting cases that are information rich because they are unusual or special in some way, such as outstanding successes or notable failures" (Patton, 2002, pp. 230–231). Staff at campus art museums with Kress Collections were sent letters, asking those who were interested in participating in the study, and who would identify their museum as *exemplary* in their academic and extracurricular involvement at their institutions, to submit letters and documents detailing how their museums were what the campus art museum at its best could be. We received thirteen responses. One museum was used as a pilot site. Eleven of the remaining museums provided compelling evidence of exemplarity to us.

Cost and our timeline prohibited travel to all eleven museums, so we had to figure out if we would choose several museums in similar contexts (private colleges or public universities, same geographic locale, etc.), or museums at institutions that varied in some way (rural and urban, large and small, etc.). From reading associated literature, we had hunches that several factors, such as whether private or public, might affect the positioning of museums in institutions. So we then used *maximum variation sampling* to select five cases that varied widely on indicators that situate campus art museums differently: private/public institutions, large/small campus populations, and rural/urban locations. Our intent was to include museums from settings as diverse as possible. During this site selection process, we noticed that the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation had given many of the campus art museums interested in the study large, multiyear grants to increase their participation in academic curriculums (Goethals & Fabing, 2007). We decided that our study should make an effort to include museums that had not received such grants as well as those that had. That decision helped us in our final selection of five sites. But we were not yet done. Because of the geographical proximity of several sites and their persuasive letters, the study was widened to include briefer stays at two more sites. We were then ready to let each selected site know, and to begin scheduling dates for visits.

This was a large qualitative research study. You are most likely not planning such a geographically wide and multi-institutional study. Depending upon the breadth you desire for your study, however, you may plan to visit several sites. Sampling strategies such as those used in the art museum study are discussed

in more detail in the section on selection of study participants. The strategies apply to choosing both sites and participants. Before explicating these strategies, however, I turn to the topic of selecting a site with which you are intimately familiar, such as the school where you work. This topic is discussed in depth because novice researchers frequently turn to their backyard for site selection. Doing so has advantages, but not without drawbacks.

Backyard Research. Researchers are often drawn to studying their own institution or agency, to doing **backyard research**. Doing so is attractive for a number of reasons: They have relatively easy access; the groundwork for rapport is already established; the research would be useful for their professional or personal life; and the amount of time and money needed for various research steps would be reduced. As a novice researcher, you may be tempted to undertake backyard studies, but you should do so fully aware of the possible problems generated by your involvement in and commitment to your familiar territory.

Previous experiences with settings or peoples can set up expectations for certain types of interactions that will constrain effective data collection. When you enter a place new to you, those with whom you interact know that you are the “researcher.” That is your role, although research participants often assign other roles to you, too. When studying in your own backyard, you often already have a position—as teacher or principal or caseworker or friend. When you add on the researcher persona, both you and those around you may experience confusion over which role you are or should be playing at a particular moment.

Carolyn, for example, was interested in physically disabled children and interviewed special education supervisors in her own community about their work. She herself was the mother of a disabled child. She said of her interviewees, “They couldn’t disassociate my research role from my role as a parent of a handicapped child.” Instead of giving careful answers to her questions, they tended to say, “Well, you know what it’s like,” or “We’ve talked about this before.”

Gordon was a school principal whose pilot project involved interviewing students in his school. He provides another example of problems associated with choosing one’s backyard as the research site:

Ah! the innocence of the novice researcher! Feeling smug with my own cleverness for choosing a subject both near and dear, I set out to do my research. What could be easier? I was a well-established, well-regarded principal in a small community. Principals are supposed to study student achievement. Thus I had not only the right, but also the professional imperative to visit classrooms and interview students if these activities would bring about improvement in the educational program. I knew each subject individually, my teachers respected me (I had hired most of them), and I had control of scheduling. Best of all, I was the main gatekeeper for the school. Thus, through my role as principal, I had the opportunity, the right, and the resources to make short work of interviews and observations. What could go wrong?

Well, several things. First of all, as principal I was on duty anytime I was in the building and crises didn’t go away just because I was doing qualitative

research. Thus my good intentions to make observations and do interviews were regularly shattered by irate parents, students with personal problems, broken boilers, and wayward buses. Second, as a principal it was my responsibility to protect the education of children wherever possible. How, then, could I justify taking children out of class to interview them about achievement when half of them were reputed to be underachievers? Third, as the primary disciplinarian in the school, I became involved in a long-term disciplinary process with two of my subjects, and I lost valuable data because I was unable to interview them. Finally, as principal, I felt pressure not to upset rapport with teachers, so I found that I tried not to rock the boat any more than I had to. I think I lost valuable data by not interviewing them about their views on the underachievement of students.

What did I learn from all this? First of all, I've found that it's a good idea to go away from home to do your research. Research should be undertaken at least far enough away so that your job role does not interfere with your activities. Second, conduct your research where you are not so emotionally close to your subjects that it distorts your design, preferably someplace where you have not worked and lived for many years.

In addition to the access and scheduling problems that Gordon identified, backyard research easily can get messy. Politically charged situations can leave participants or you feeling vulnerable. Anne, for example, decided to inquire into the use of a particular educational computer program in area schools. What she did not take into consideration at the outset of her research were the people invested in keeping the program in the schools, including her boss. She states, "He was offended by the analysis. I have now had to edit my analysis to create a less in-depth and more toned down version of the original. My eyes are open to the political ramifications of research. And I have learned to not do research in my own backyard." Interviews also frequently uncover what can be termed *dangerous knowledge*, or information that is politically risky to hold, particularly for an insider. Such problems are not limited to backyard research, but they do seem to proliferate there. Ending the research is also different in backyard settings. When inquiring into a phenomenon set in an unfamiliar local, a researcher eventually leaves the town, agency, or culture even though connections may remain for life. You don't usually leave your own "backyard," although you may want to as a result of the "dangerous knowledge" you obtain in your researcher role.

These warnings against research in your own backyard apply, in general, to qualitative studies where the researcher is the primary investigator. Various forms of action research, including participatory action research, **teacher research**, and collaborative research, tend to work best in "backyard" settings because of the collaborative nature of the work as well as the agreed-upon purpose, oriented toward some sort of change. The knowledge gained tends to be open knowledge from which the group as a whole learns and forms new directions. Your being part of the program or organization contributes to the effectiveness of the work because research is generally a beginning step in a longer, change-oriented process. Indeed, action research is difficult to carry out when you are not part of the organization

because the people involved in the research tend to be those most invested in carrying out the needed changes.

Backyard research can be extremely valuable, but it needs to be entered with heightened consciousness of potential difficulties. Qualitative research classes often include a pilot research project as a semester assignment. Because of the apparent ease involved in accessing and talking with people you already know, you may be inclined to design a project around observing and interviewing colleagues, partners, or friends for the assignment. Making this choice is understandable, but you are likely to learn more about doing qualitative research and about your topic if you create a project that takes you to strangers or people you don't know well.

Selection of Study Participants and Locations for Observations

Since most research situations are too vast for you to interview everyone or to observe everything associated with the topic, you need a justifiable selection strategy by which to choose people, events, and times. Random sampling, the strategy often used in quantitative research, is appropriate for selecting a large, statistically representative sample from which generalizations can be drawn. Qualitative researchers seldom work with populations large enough to make random sampling meaningful, nor is it their purpose to produce generalizations. Qualitative researchers tend to select each of their cases *purposefully*: “The logic and power of purposeful sampling ... leads to selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (Patton, 2002, p. 46).

Patton (2002) identifies and discusses sixteen different purposeful sampling strategies. I provide definitions of several of these strategies in Figure 2.5, as examples of ways in which you might think about what you want to know and, accordingly, the sampling decisions you would make. Different sampling strategies allow you to learn different things about your topic. Each strategy suggests particular kinds of sites and people.

Committee members and funding agencies often expect the research proposal to delineate clearly how many and which persons will be interviewed, as well as how many and which situations will be observed. The researcher, therefore, is tempted to develop complex selection matrices. Thinking of important stratification criteria is a good place to begin, but do not get overinvested in including all the possible configurations of such variables as ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic class, educational level, sexual orientation, age, and so on in your study. Select only those criteria that the literature and your experience suggest are particularly important, and remember that the selection strategy is often refined as the researcher produces data.

For example, as Carol began her study of the leisure styles of later-life widows, she assumed that leisure was affected by social class, years of education, employment status, and leisure options locally available. Varying her selection

Typical case sampling	Illustrates or highlights what is typical, normal.
Extreme or deviant case sampling	Selects cases from the extremes, cases that are unusual or special in some way, such as high school valedictorians and dropouts, or female scientists who work in Antarctica.
Homogeneous sampling	Selects all similar cases in order to describe some subgroup in depth such as a study of female professors from working-class backgrounds who were the first generation in their families to receive a college education (Clark, 1999).
Maximum variation sampling	Selects cases that cut across some range of variation such as students of different ethnic backgrounds enrolled in an environmental studies program. Searches for common patterns across great variation.
Theoretical sampling	Selects cases, people, events, activities, etc., through evolving theoretical constructs in one's research. Associated with grounded theory, but also used by others working within interpretive traditions.
Snowball, chain, or network sampling	Obtains knowledge of potential cases from people who know people who meet research interests. Wright and Decker (1997) used this approach to find men and women who were active armed robbers at the time of their research. Snowball sampling is useful for getting started when you have <i>no other way</i> to find the participants you want, but it is not always a sufficient strategy in itself for participant selection.
Convenience sampling	Selects cases on the basis of convenience. This strategy has low credibility and is inappropriate for anything other than "practice."

FIGURE 2.5 Some Selection Strategies for Research Sites and Participants

Informed by Exhibit 5.6 in M. Q. Patton. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

of study participants by these attributes would help her to learn more about her topic. Nonetheless, as Carol began collecting data, she learned of other criteria that appeared to affect leisure styles—such as how recently the women had been widowed—and knew she had to include these attributes in her selection strategy. As she spent time in the field, Carol decided that there was too much variation for her to understand the leisure styles of all later-life widows. She narrowed her focus to one group: high-school-educated, working, recently widowed, urban women. Doing so simplified her selection of participants and allowed her to go deeply into the leisure behavior of a reasonably homogeneous group. What struck

Carol as ideal at the planning stage of her project was replaced by something both useful and feasible.

Rebecca also chose a fairly homogeneous sampling strategy, since she was choosing depth rather than breadth of understanding. She described her rationale for her selection of adolescent girl participants:

I am not as concerned about studying a broad spectrum of girls so much as gaining a preliminary understanding of the intersection of girls' friendship and the development of self. . . . Once I have gained an understanding of this issue, I can then move on to exploring how it plays out across a broad spectrum of girls. . . .

By definition, my study requires the engagement of girls who are quite young. To have any breadth of access, I will require the full support and cooperation of their families. Given these considerations, I will choose for my case studies six girls I either already know, or know of, through my circle of academic relationships, and I will ask each girl to invite a best friend to participate with her. . . . Engaging this rather homogeneous circle of girls will allow me to describe their collective understanding of friendship and the development of self with somewhat less confusion from factors such as SES, education [of family], and significant family differences. Although drawing on this circle of girls will allow me to gain depth in my understanding and description of girls' friendship, I realize I will lose diversity.

As Rebecca's discussion suggests, in the numbers game, depth is traded for breadth. How many persons must you interview? Do you do multisession interviews? How much must you observe? How do you know when to stop? There are no magic answers. Morse (1994, p. 225) suggests between thirty and fifty interviews for ethnographic and grounded-theory research. This could mean interviews with thirty to fifty different people or multiple repeat interviews with fewer people, which Rebecca did with her study of girls' friendships. You also may focus more time on participant observation or other means of data collection than on conducting formal interviews.

In addition to choosing interviewees, consider selection strategies for observation locales and times. Do the settings for your research have cycles or seasons of activity, as well as episodic occasions that affect what goes on? If so, your observations should take account of the different phases of the cycle, as well as the different occasions. This does not mean that observations need to occur every day, but it does mean that time and places, as well as people, are part of sampling decisions. Classroom observations made only on Mondays may present a very different picture from observations made only on Fridays. Teachers and their students may interact quite differently in September than they do in December, as they may before football games, proms, and all the other big events that temporarily stand a school on end.

For depth understanding, spend extended periods with fewer respondents and limited observation sites. For greater breadth, but a more superficial understanding, carry out one-time interviews with more people and fewer observations in more situations. The strategy of participant selection in qualitative inquiry rests on the multiple purposes of illuminating, interpreting, and understanding—and

on your own imagination and judgment. Develop your rationale for choosing those with whom you will speak based upon your reading of associated theory and literature, your methodological framework, your personal experiences and hunches, and what you have learned through your pilot study.

PLANNING FOR TRUSTWORTHINESS AND TIME

Trustworthiness

The *trustworthiness* of your study should receive attention as you plan your research and develop a proposal. Trustworthiness is about alertness to the quality and rigor of a study, about what sorts of criteria can be used to assess how well the research was carried out. Drawing upon the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), qualitative researchers have described specific strategies as contributing to the trustworthiness of a study (see, for example, Creswell, 1998). These procedures are summarized in Figure 2.6. The trustworthy criteria primarily pertain

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION
Prolonged engagement and persistent observations	Spending extended time in the field for observations, interviews, and other forms of interaction
Triangulation	Using multiple data-collection methods, multiple sources, multiple investigators, and/or multiple theoretical perspectives
Rich, thick description	Making use of observations and interview transcripts to write descriptively, allowing readers to understand the context for your interpretations
Negative case analysis	Seeking negative cases and nonconfirming evidence to your interpretation of patterns and themes
Member checking	Sharing interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, and/or drafts of the final report with research participants and obtaining their feedback and interpretations
Clarification of researcher bias and subjectivity	Reflecting upon your subjectivities and upon how they are both used and monitored
Peer review and debriefing	Obtaining external reflection and input on your work
Audit trail	Saving and organizing all documents related to your research (field notes, research journal, coding schemes, etc.) as a record of your research process

FIGURE 2.6 In Search of Trustworthiness

to research methods, to techniques for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Their descriptions will make more sense after you have read about conducting inquiry. Trustworthiness, therefore, receives attention in both Chapters 5 and 7, after practices and terms related to augmenting the trustworthiness of a study have been discussed.

Guba and Lincoln reevaluated their trustworthiness criteria in their text *Fourth Generation Evaluation* (1989). They proposed a second set of guidelines that they called “authenticity criteria,” which were more about the purpose and outcomes of constructivist research. These criteria focus principally on the extent to which participants are co-constructors of learning and benefit through the research process. If you are interested in and considering research that moves toward transformation and change, see the discussion of transformational validity in Chapter 5, and seek out more on these criteria.

The Time Frame

You cannot know with certainty how long your research will take. Invariably, you will underestimate the amount of time needed. For example, gaining access to a school may drag on because the school board did not address the researcher’s plans on the evening scheduled. Introduction to the school’s teachers is delayed because the teachers’ meeting was canceled. People reschedule interviews at the last moment, or they don’t show up. Unexpected assemblies or field trips change observation schedules.

That things simply take longer than planned is a basic given in qualitative research. Terry Denny advised students at the University of Illinois to figure how much time each step should take and multiply by two and a half. It took even longer than that for Mark, who was studying attitudes of correctional officers toward educational programs for inmates:

I had expected that contacting the officers and arranging for interviews would take a day or two at most. It was over a month between when I scheduled my first interview until I arranged the last one. I had not counted on vacations, weddings, changing shifts, or even officers changing job sites. Not a single interview happened at the time it was originally scheduled. One officer was ordered to work back-to-back shifts because of lack of staff. Twice, officers were ordered to transport offenders to other facilities. One officer was ordered to work an hour longer than her normal shift (due to understaffing) so she could guard the perimeter fence while inmates enjoyed their outside recreation period. No wonder another officer complained in his interview that inmates have more freedom than the officers who guard them.

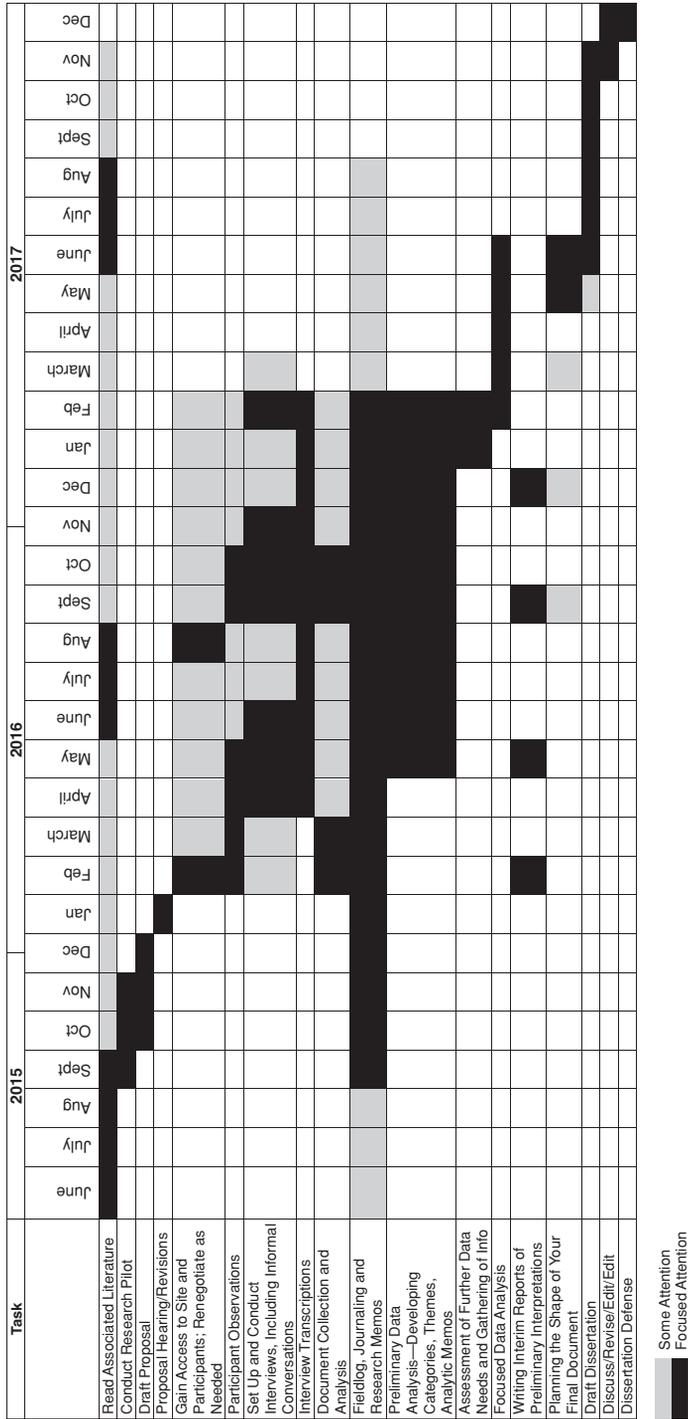
Despite the delays, do not become discouraged. Rather, remember that unless you are researching your own backyard or doing some form of action or collaborative research, you are external, if not alien, to the lives of research participants. You are not necessarily unwanted, but because you are not integral to the lives of your “others,” you are dispensable. You will complete your research tasks, but normally later than you expect.

Institutional structures affect schedule planning. For example, the elementary and high school setting is more structured than the university setting. The scheduling of bells to demarcate set periods assists researchers in planning whom they can interview or when they can observe and for how long. Institutional frameworks also affect the control that respondents have over their time. In general, individuals who hold higher places in the institutional hierarchy have greater autonomy to declare when they are free. Yet they often are busy individuals who reschedule appointments as a matter of course. Those lower in the hierarchy often have little autonomy to set a time to talk. When Lynne interviewed the custodial staff of a university, she had to work through the physical plant manager. He helped develop a schedule, communicate the research intent to the staff, and release individuals for interviews. As a result, Lynne was grateful to the manager for access and to the workers for their stories, but she felt caught, at times, between the two. A way around this situation would be to interview people when they are not at work, although that can create other challenges.

Your personal situation also affects the time frame, particularly if circumstances demand that you work at a full-time job while carrying out your inquiry. A number of foundations and associations fund qualitative research, but your interests need to match those of the funding body, and the application process begins early, sometimes as much as a year before the research commences. Even with funding, some professionals cannot leave their work as teacher, nurse, or administrator. You may, however, be able to negotiate release time for a limited period. Particularly when immersed in data analysis and writing, consider requesting several hours a day off rather than one full day a week. This allows you to attend to your research daily and forces you to use the limited time to the fullest, rather than dealing with the illusion of having a full day and then whittling away the time with other tasks and errands.

Despite problems in estimating the time needed to carry out research, developing a timetable is a good idea. Creating a timetable helps you to assess each proposed aspect of the research and to anticipate its requirements: arrangements to be made, letters to be emailed, people to be phoned, and places to be visited. Although data analysis and writing are somewhat integrated with data collection, they should receive at least as much scheduled time as data collection; it is relatively easier to collect data than it is to make sense of them and to shape them satisfactorily as words on a page. Finally, the timetable serves as a reality check on the feasibility—given the inevitable constraints of time and finances—of your choice of research topic, methods, sites, and participants. See Figure 2.7 for an example of a dissertation timetable. This timetable is meant more as a guide to parts of a study that you may need to consider and plan time for than as a suggestion of how much time to allot to specific tasks. The amount of time you estimate will depend on the research proposed, how you work, and other demands upon your life.

Like other qualitative research tools, the timetable must remain flexible. In face-to-face interactions, unforeseen circumstances occur that can considerably delay your plans. On one hand, this can be a source of frustration and anxiety.



Some Attention
 Focused Attention

FIGURE 2.7 Example of a Dissertation Timetable

On the other, the unforeseen is part of the world of exploration, and if you are open to what you can learn from occurrences that deviate from your plans, you may use them to acquire better data and a better understanding of the people and setting under study.

MEETING PARTICIPANTS: ACCESS, RESEARCH SUMMARIES, AND THE PILOT

Gaining and Maintaining Access

Gaining access to potential research sites and participants is sometimes a simple matter, sometimes not. Gaining access involves acquisition of consent to go where you want, observe what you want, talk to whomever you want, obtain and read whatever documents you require, and do all of this for whatever period of time is necessary to satisfy research purposes. If you receive full and unqualified consent, then you have obtained total access. If your access is qualified somehow, then you must explore the meaning of the qualifications for meeting research expectations: Should you redefine your research? Should you select another site?

If the study involves some sort of organization or agency, then you first make contact with its **gatekeepers**, the person or persons who must give their consent before you may enter a research setting, and with whom you negotiate the conditions of gaining and maintaining access. Since several different gatekeepers may exist, making contact can be complicated, involving different persons at different times. If, for example, you want to study in a particular elementary school, do you go first to the principal, the superintendent, or the school board? Starting anywhere but at the top of the hierarchy can be risky because acceptance by those in the lower ranks may be negated by supervisors. Yet gaining acceptance at the top is also risky because others may feel ordered to cooperate or may think that you are somehow politically aligned with one of several factions. It helps to know an insider who is familiar with the individuals and the politics involved and who can advise you in making access decisions.

If you are interested in individuals unrelated to any organizational structure, then you must make direct contact with these potential participants. Whether approaching gatekeepers or a series of individuals, you want them to say, "Yes, your study sounds interesting. You are welcome." Such a response is more likely if your research will benefit participants and/or their community in some way. Gaining access is also more likely if you are introduced by an intermediary whom the gatekeepers or potential participants know and respect. When there is not an intermediary, and even sometimes when there is, gaining access to people within a site may be best achieved by first *logging time*. Just being around, participating in activities, and talking informally with people gives them time to get used to you and learn that you are okay.

When meeting with the gatekeeper or gatekeepers, be prepared to present your research lay summary (discussed in next section), listen and respond to concerns and demands, and clarify overarching issues. Make clear that your

data—fieldnotes and interview transcripts—belong to you (or to you and the respondent) to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality that you promise. Make clear also what you will deliver. This relates to your responsibility to meet respondents' expectations for things such as final reports or consultation about certain issues. Finally, make clear the emergent possibilities of qualitative research. In other words, make sure the gatekeeper understands that during the course of research, new issues may surface that could require more discussion, initiated by either party. Gaining access is an initial undertaking. Maintaining access is another matter, occasioned by changes in the expectations and needs of both researcher and participants at any time during the research process.

Despite utmost care, rejections do occur. It is easy to overreact and become paranoid when faced with negative responses to requests to visit a site, interview, sit in a class, or attend a meeting. Although the negative response may be real, resist concluding that you will not be allowed to carry out the study. The rejection may be unrelated to anything you have done or could have done, but it is, nonetheless, a signal to reflect on what you are doing and perhaps to rethink your approach.

Sometimes denied access may turn out for the best, as it did in Lorna's pilot study of inclusion of special needs children in schools:

I initially wanted to observe more than two schools. This was probably totally unrealistic, since I very much underestimated the time involved in all aspects of the project. However, I immediately encountered some access problems. I was unable to connect with one building principal to get permission to observe in that school. Multiple phone calls where I did not get further than the secretary left me frustrated. I finally gave up and focused on the other two classrooms. This is probably the "old blessing in disguise" since I would have felt even more inundated with too many data to deal with.

Allow time for gaining access, and then do your best to make those in the research site desire to keep you around.

The Lay Summary

Part of gaining access involves creating a thoughtful research summary or information letter for potential participants. Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) tend to refer to this letter as the **lay summary** that accompanies a consent form. A research summary is a written (sometimes a verbal) description of your research that you give to research participants to help explain who you are, what you are doing, and what role you would like them to play in your research. In general, research summaries address the following points:

1. Who you are
2. What you are doing and why
3. What you will do with the results
4. How the study site and participants were selected

5. Any possible risks as well as benefits to the participant
6. If applicable, the promise of confidentiality and anonymity to participants and site
7. How often you would like to observe and meet for interviews
8. How long you expect each session to last
9. Requests to record observations and words (by notes or audio or video recording)

There is no one way to construct a research summary. What you develop depends upon the framework and needs of your research. You do, however, have the responsibility to be as clear and honest as possible in telling your research participants who you are, what you want to do and why, how you plan to go about it, and what you will do with the information you receive. You should be prepared as well for questions that participants might have, such as, "Can I see the data?" or "Will I get a copy of the final report?" Anticipate such questions and be able to give reasonable answers and explanations without promising more than you can deliver.

Following is the research summary that Rebecca gave her adolescent participants:

You are invited to participate in a research study to learn about girls' friendship and development of their "self" (ideas about who you are and what you are like). This research is being done as part of my program as a doctoral student at the University of Vermont.

I am asking you to participate because I believe that your ideas and feelings about friendship and self would help me to better understand girls' friendship during this time of their growing up. The benefits to you of doing this study are that you might learn some new things about yourself, you might enjoy sharing your ideas and feelings about friendship and self with other girls like you, and you might even make some new friends. In addition, your participation in this study may help me and others better understand how to help girls have good friendships and help them feel good about themselves. There is, however, a risk that sometimes, for some people, talking about relationships and how they see themselves can be upsetting.

I will be the only person (other than your parents) who knows that you are participating in this study. Anytime I use the information you give me, I will always identify you with a fake name (if you would like, you can decide what name I use for you). When I interview you I would like your permission to tape-record our interviews, sometimes videotape them, take photographs, and also take notes to remind me about what we talked about. I will be the only one who gets to listen to or see these tapes, videos, and notes, and when I am not using them they will be kept in a locked cabinet that only I have the key to. After I have finished with this study, all of these tapes will be destroyed. I would, however, like to take photographs to include in my presentation of my dissertation. If I use a photograph of you, I will use your fake name to identify the picture, and I will not pair your photograph with what you said about friendship and self. You may choose not to allow me to take photographs of you while you participate in this

study. At the end of this consent, I will ask you to check off whether you do or do not give me permission to take and use your photograph.

As part of your participation in this study, I will spend time with you and talk with you over the course of a number of weeks. I will first talk with you by yourself for an hour or two and ask you questions about friendship and yourself. During this interview, I will also ask you for the name of a friend you would like to have participate in this study with you. After I have arranged for your friend to be part of this study, I will talk with you both together and ask you questions about your friendship and how this friendship makes you feel (about 1–2 hours). Next, I will spend several periods of time with you and your friend so I can see what you and your friend do together and what you talk about (about 3–9 hours altogether, depending on what you and your friend feel comfortable with). Then I will have you get together with the other girls like you who are participating in this study and ask you as a group to talk about friendship and self (I think this part will be some sort of pizza party at my house—about 3 hours). This may be the last part of this study, but my plan is to talk with all of you at this point and see if it might be helpful for me to talk to all or some of you some more.

The most important thing for you to remember while you are participating in this study with me is that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions I ask you. All I am looking for is your opinions or ideas or feelings, and if I ask you to tell me more, or explain your answer, it is because I want to be really sure I understand what you are telling me. Always remember that in this situation you are the expert, or teacher, and you are explaining to me what friendship and self is like for you and girls like you.

You should also know that you can decide to not participate in this study or stop doing it at any time after you have started—this is your decision. If you decide to stop doing this study, your decision will not affect any future contact you have with the University of Vermont.

As discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, IRBs have the responsibility of reviewing all research conducted in an institution receiving federal funds for research, whether or not any of the funds go to the specific study. IRBs are charged with making sure research participants are aware of potential risks and benefits related to taking part in a study. IRB committees look specifically for research lay summaries, consent forms, and examples of interview questions or other research “instruments” in addition to generally assessing the overall design of a study. Hatch (2002) provides some helpful advice based on his experience:

Before I served on my IRB, I had my students submit their full proposals as attachments to their IRB applications, and some universities require this. Since serving, my advice is to just give institutional review committees what they ask for and to give it to them in clear, understandable language. (p. 61)

In particular, IRB committee members make sure that research participants will be informed about the research, are made aware of any possible risks in taking part, and will voluntarily give consent to be involved.

The Pilot Study

A **pilot study** helps you practice being open to learning from unforeseen circumstances and perspectives. You enter a pilot study with a different frame of mind than when you are ready to begin the full-scale study. The idea is not to get data per se but to learn about the research process, interview questions, observation techniques, and yourself. Use the pilot to determine how your lay summary works: Is it too long or not detailed enough? What else do people want to know? Does it inform as broadly as necessary to reassure others about your proposed project? Use the pilot study to test the language and substance of your interview questions, as well as the overall length of your interview. Use it to assess your observation techniques: How do those who are observed respond? What would make them feel more comfortable? Can you take fieldnotes as you observe, or should you write them up after observation periods? Less obvious than learning about your interview questions and getting a general sense of the nature of your research setting is the need to learn how to be present in that setting. Does the institution or organization have rules and expectations that you need to learn? What taboos might you need to avoid? All these aspects help you to gain access and keep it. Clarify your piloting intentions and enlist participants' help. For example, you might say, "I would like to interview you with these questions and then talk to you afterward about the questions themselves: How clear are they? Are they appropriate? What else should I be asking?"

Finally, use the pilot as a chance to inform yourself about the topic. How does your research statement hold up? Do new research questions arise? Changes in research focus may indicate poor planning, but they are also likely to indicate new learning. As Carol noted after her pilot project, "Qualitative research is like the game of twister. You spin the dial and end up somewhere else." It is important to be open to changes so that the best possible connections among researcher, research participants, and topic will result.

How many people need to be in the pilot? Again, there is no specific answer. The number and variability should be sufficient to allow you to explore likely problems, as well as to give you information on the topic and a sense of the setting and procedures to use. With the results of the pilot, you may revise your research statement, research plans, interview questions, and even your way of presenting yourself.

As you create your research proposal, make use of your pilot by describing how your research plans have been influenced by the pilot, but do not view the pilot as a study in itself. I have seen dissertation proposals in which students cited their pilot (APA format) along with statements such as "Previous research (student's name, year) showed that. . . ." You cannot make such claims from a pilot, but you can describe how your pilot indicated specific groups of people to be interviewed or topics to pursue. A pilot helps you to develop ideas and research plans and should be viewed this way.

Neither this chapter nor any other specification of prestudy tasks can exhaust the possibilities of what you personally might anticipate and do before you begin to collect data for a pilot or a full-blown study. You may engage in exhaustive,

detailed planning; or you may be comfortable with preparations well short of exhaustiveness. In this, as in so much of research, you need to find your own style, so that you will learn what works for you. Getting ready to conduct your study is not an end in itself. It is a means to the end of data production. Chapters 3 and 4 address such activity and focus on participant observation, visual research, document collection, and interviewing.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

- Maxwell, J. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Walnut Creek, CA: Sage.
- Schram, T. (2006). *Conceptualizing and proposing qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.

EXERCISES

Class Exercises

1. This exercise goes about research in an unorthodox way—beginning with the research participants in search of a “problem.” I suggest this exercise not as a way to *do* research, but as a way to *practice* ethnographic techniques. Consider your classmates the research participants. Now work together to create a research statement to which each student could bring some expertise. Frame your research statement in a clear, focused way. For example, the class may want to describe and analyze how part-time graduate students perceive, manage, and assign priority to their multiple roles. Or they may decide to explore the role “peer learning” has played in the education of graduate students. Develop what you consider an appropriate qualitative research statement. This statement will serve as the basis for more class exercises in chapters to come.
2. Keeping the research statement (from Exercise 1) as the core, develop three to five research questions that help to focus your topic. List possible aspects of the conceptual framework that would guide a literature review if you were to do one.
3. Review Maxwell’s (2013, pp. 30–31) five categories of goals that qualitative research can help you achieve: understanding meaning for participants; understanding context and influence of context on participants; generating theory, exploratory; understanding process; and causal explanation as applied to processes. As a class, number off by 5 with each group assigned one of these purposes. Your general area of interest is graduate education. As a subgroup, develop a research statement that would link well to your assigned purpose. Compare and discuss.

Individual Exercises

1. Diagram your current understanding (working theory) of a research issue of interest to you. What important concepts are parts of this research interest, and how do they relate? Begin searching for, reading, and taking notes on relevant literature.

2. Through writing a set of research memos, work out differences between your research statement and your research purposes. Try asking yourself what it is that you hope your research will do or change (your purposes). Then, ask yourself what is it that you need to understand that might have these effects (your research statement).
3. Draft research questions to further elucidate your research statement.
4. While discussing metaphors, author Bill Roorbach (1998) quotes comedian Steven Wright: "I've got a mind like a steel trap: rusty and illegal in thirty-seven states" (p. 126). This following exercise is adapted from one of Roorbach's writing exercises.

In a long paragraph, compare your project focus to something else. You can use what you might see as "obvious" metaphors: The school is like a factory, or implementing a new program is like constructing a building. You could also use a less obvious metaphor: The school is like a rodeo, or implementing the new program is like fishing. Extend the metaphor as far as you can go, to the absurd, while posing questions about your topic. Here's Roorbach asking questions of the mind like a steel trap:

If your mind is like a steep trap, what is the spring? What is the steel plate that triggers the release mechanism? If animals are ideas and minds are traps, do minds destroy ideas? Do ideas have lives separate from minds? Do ideas roam the wilderness? What are the furs of ideas? And tell me this: Who is the trapper running the trap line? What's the chain? What's the stake? (p. 126)

Write a second paragraph reflecting upon how this metaphor activity may have led you to think differently about or to ask some new questions of your topic.

5. Draft a research lay summary or information letter for potential research participants. What more do you need to think about and learn to be able to feel confident of being ready to hand this letter to participants?