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## 1

## Going Around the Bend and Back

### *Qualitative Inquiry in Psychological Research*

Paul M. Camic

If you go “around the bend,” it’s thought that you might be very confused, mixed up about things, or even feeling a little crazy; this has been my experience of how challenging it can sometimes feel to learn—and to teach—qualitative methods. From what I came across as both an undergraduate and a doctoral student, and later as an early career researcher and clinician, the excitement of qualitative possibilities in research occasionally felt impenetrable under the lexicon of qualitative terminology, like being lost in a fog of jargon that seemed disconnected from what I already knew about the scientific method, positive epistemology, and statistical analysis. It was, at times, a very long bend in the road, making it unclear where one was going to end up. Recent doctoral students have also sometimes echoed my earlier experiences during discussions about the density of “epistemological positions,” impenetrability of “competing paradigms,” or the mystery of “emerging themes,” for example, which to them has felt like some sort of loyalty test or political party broadcast. This has not been helped by some qualitative researchers and theoreticians who have created an “us versus them” environment, akin to a formidable 1960s Berlin Wall-style structure of concepts, ideas, methods, and analytic processes that never allowed the bend to straighten out and come to an intersection where it could connect with other roads that might offer possibilities to integrate different paradigms, epistemologies, methodologies, and their resulting research designs. The sometimes off-putting language of differing ontological beliefs and epistemological positions, occasionally seeming defensive, has not always done

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qualitative research in psychology any favors, although it is understandable that the field has needed to differentiate itself from the Goliath of quantitative research (Hamilton, 1994).

More recently Rennie (2012) identified the lack of a unifying qualitative methodology contributing to the relative marginalization of qualitative inquiry within psychology. For qualitative methods to have more credibility, he suggested that all qualitative research is hermeneutical and through the use of the hermeneutic circle method, the “activity of educing and articulating the meaning of a text through abduction, theorematic deduction and induction . . . enables demonstration, achieved rhetorically, of the validity of the understandings of the text under study” (p. 385). His attempts at developing a coherent qualitative methodology that might unify many if not all qualitative methods is an important development in psychological science.

The present volume views qualitative designs and methods as both independent approaches to research that stand on their own and that act as companions to other qualitative (Fine et al., Chapter 5) and quantitative (Harding et al., Chapter 12) methods, while also being key components for intervention development and evaluation (Yardley et al., Chapter 13). The book is intended to help guide you around the bend but also take you back to a place where some form of integration among epistemological perspectives, different paradigms, types of research questions, data collection processes, analytic tools, and writing discussion sections might seem feasible—and possible. From my perspective, going around the bend and back means connecting up qualitative research to the wider psychological, social science, and health sciences communities and to the problems they are trying to solve. It means pragmatism over ideology and encourages qualitative inquiry to be used alongside different methodological and paradigmatic traditions to answer different and sometimes complementary research questions (for an expanded discussion of pragmatism in psychological research and in research practice, respectively, see Rennie, 2000; and Yardley & Bishop, 2007). Qualitative research is not a unified field, and forms of data collection, goals of research, and types of data analysis can vary widely (Madill & Gough, 2008), making it a far more pluralistic approach than is sometimes recognized (see Barker & Pistrang, Chapter 2).

Qualitative inquiry in psychology has had a distinguished, albeit somewhat hidden, history among North American psychologists until relatively recently, when it has gradually entered the curriculum of a number of undergraduate and graduate psychology departments. Although it has tended to be more widely accepted in Europe, as demonstrated by undergraduate and postgraduate course offerings and by research output, the American Psychological Association (APA) has shown increased interest and support through the addition of a qualitative section to its methodology division and renaming it “Division 5: Quantitative and Qualitative Methods” (APA, n.d.) and by developing new journal reporting guidelines on qualitative, mixed-methods, and qualitative meta-analysis (Levitt et al., 2018). In Asia, the launch of the Asian Qualitative Research Association in 2015 brought together hundreds of researchers from different disciplines; it has now grown to several thousand members. Qualitative research in Africa

remains more limited, likely because of the restricted financial resources and the lack of interest in these methods by policy makers and government funders (Dzvimbo, 2006), yet there is a growing and dynamic community of researchers in many countries across different disciplines (Barnes, 2012) that are making substantial contributions to an African-centric perspective, researched and written by Africans and not by visiting Europeans and North Americans looking in from afar.

### **(TRYING TO) MAKE SENSE OF COMPLEXITY**

In the classic children's book *The Phantom Tollbooth*, Norton Juster tells the story of two brothers, King Azaz and the Mathemagician, who inherited their father's kingdom of Wisdom. They were by nature very suspicious and jealous. Each one tried to outdo the other. King Azaz insisted that words were far more significant than numbers and hence that his kingdom was truly the greater, and the Mathemagician claimed that numbers were much more important than words and hence that his kingdom was supreme. They discussed and debated and raved and ranted until they were on the verge of blows when it was decided to submit the question to arbitration by the princesses Rhyme and Reason. After days of careful consideration in which all the evidence was weighted and all the witnesses heard, they made their decision:

Words and numbers are of equal value, for, in the cloak of knowledge, one is warp and the other woof. It is no more important to count the sands than it is to name the stars. Therefore, let both kingdoms live in peace. (Juster, 1965, pp. 74–75)

Unfortunately, Rhyme and Reason's exquisite logic fell on deaf ears. The princesses were banished from the kingdom, and the full breadth of knowledge remained elusive for many years. Until the past 10 years or so, a similar fate appears to have beset the kingdom of psychology, where quantitative and qualitative methodologists have met each other with resistance and skepticism. Yet promising new developments have seen, if not parity, an acceptance and a welcoming of methodological diversity in psychology, medicine, gerontology, and related fields (e.g., Cooper, 2012; Kitto et al., 2008; Levitt et al., 2018; Schoenberg & McAuley, 2007). Since the publication of the first edition of this book in 2003, attempts at finding common ground are prevailing and qualitative approaches to understanding the human experience are no longer being relegated to an ancillary role (e.g., Cooper et al., 2012). One could argue that an overreliance of psychology on positivist epistemology, which asserts that there are universal truths or laws to be discovered and quantitatively measured, has hampered inventiveness, restricting the very nature of the questions that have been asked and the sources of data that have been considered legitimate. As in *The Phantom Tollbooth*, wherein the princesses were ultimately rescued and their recommendations heeded, momentum from different fields within psychology and related disciplines are now incorporating qualitative methods into a range of research areas. Like the first edition, my hope is that this volume helps to continue the momentum by encouraging psychological researchers to

value the kinds of questions qualitative methods can answer, to further consider a pragmatic approach to paradigm integration, and to bring about greater methodological inclusiveness and appreciation of the range and depth of qualitative approaches to psychological and social research.

## BACKGROUND: THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

In his attempt to rescue Rhyme and Reason, the protagonist in *The Phantom Tollbooth*, Milo, journeys through the kingdom of numbers, Digitopolis. There, a man who poses a series of problems, including one about a 68-foot-long beaver, confronts him:

“That’s absurd,” objected Milo, whose head was spinning from all the numbers and questions. “That may be true,” he acknowledged, “but it’s completely accurate, and as long as the answer is right, who cares if the question is wrong? If you want sense, you’ll have to make it yourself.” (Juster, 1965, p. 175)

Historically, psychologists, perhaps more than other social scientists, have been prone to privileging methods and procedures over research questions (Camic et al., 2003; Gergen, 1985). Putting the methodological cart before the horse of a research question can constrain our full understanding of psychological processes by limiting the kinds of questions we can ask as researchers. Moreover, basic ontological, epistemological, and methodological questions, such as “What is real?” “Who knows what is real?” and “How do you know what is real?,” respectively, are critical considerations that underpin planning psychological research and push researchers to challenge their assumptions about values, knowledge, and “acceptable” data. Pluralistic psychological research goes beyond positivism, which implicitly privileges experimental approaches to knowledge. In deciding what is real, and for whom it is real, a pluralistic approach to research might encourage both skepticism and innovation, be a little subversive, and take on new topics and questions, but remain rigorous, thorough, and useful. Shweder (1996), in an important essay about the differences between *quanta* and *qualia*, suggests that we “put our metaphysical cards on the table (our assumptions about the underlying nature of social reality)” (p. 175), thereby revealing what each of us thinks research is all about.

Those “cards” vary, of course, among the contributors to this volume. What is perhaps a common core to all the chapters, however, is discarding the notion that what separates quantitative and qualitative approaches to research is whether to count or not count, measure or not measure, sample or not sample, administer a questionnaire or conduct an interview. Because all social science research counts and measures in some way or another, a pluralistic approach considers *what* to count and measure and what one discovers when doing so (Shweder, 1996, p. 179). Stated another way, the questions become “to count and/or to discover the name,” “to measure and/or to listen and observe,” or “to administer a questionnaire and/or talk with someone.” Qualitative research interrogates whether an objective conception of reality can truly exist and suggests that other forms of investigation are necessary to increase our understanding of the phenomena

we are studying. Writing several decades ago, the Austrian sociologist and phenomenologist Alfred Schütz (1962), seeking to bridge the gap between different forms of inquiry, wrote, “the principles of controlled inference and verification by fellow scientists and the theoretical ideals of unity, simplicity, universality and precision prevail” for all empirical sciences, be they social or natural sciences (p. 49). He argued for an appreciation of pluralistic approaches to research that included valuing different research questions and methodologies that are independent of the natural (e.g., biological, physical) sciences and more relevant to studying the lived social and psychological world of people. Logic is important for all research, he contended, but the logic of the natural sciences can lead to a “monopolistic imperialism” that disregards other types of problems worthy of study.

“What is real?” evokes the issue that divided the brothers in the Kingdom of Wisdom. Stated another way, one might ask, “What is valuable?” As a profession, psychology has historically decided that numbers are more real—and more valuable—than words and responses on paper-and-pencil tests more real (and valid and valuable) than interviews, conversations, and other complex forms of representation. However, “How do you know what is real?” is perhaps the question that best defines empiricism and provides a substantial foundation for a qualitative psychology. Of course, we all know what is real—but our realities may be different, depending on our cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, language abilities, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and age. This was particularly evident in the 2020 American election, when the sense of very different lived realities were strongly articulated. Each of us—and certainly each and every research participant in our respective studies—possesses “an alternative symbolic universe (which) poses a threat because its existence demonstrates empirically that one’s own universe is less than inevitable” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 108). However, to make psychology more than empirical—to make it scientific—many of our research paradigms and methods discount the existence of an alternative symbolic universe where methods might be “mixed” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010) and paradigms integrated (Medill & Gough, 2008) to answer different types of questions and explore issues more broadly and deeply (see Chapters 5 and 12, this volume).

Among other problems, the assumption that it is primarily scientists who know what is real becomes a denial of the experience of research participants as a valid source of knowledge. This is really not an issue for biologists or chemists because their “subject” may be a diseased cell or a chemical interaction. When doing research involving people, a *de facto* hermeneutic relationship, where meaning is intersubjectivity created, develops in that the researcher and the participant are affected by each other and modify their responses, behaviors, and perceptions based on that interaction—and of course on events and histories before the interaction. This is the case whether one uses an interview or a psychometric instrument to collect data. Yet in most of psychological research, the psychologist-scientist controls the definition of reality and “the threat to the social definitions of reality is neutralized by

assigning an inferior ontological status, and thereby not to be taken seriously cognitive status, to all definitions existing outside the social universe” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 115). For example, what happens in a laboratory where a controlled social experiment takes place has had more value in psychological research than speaking with people in their own environments (see Chapter 12, this volume). Representations of research that exist outside of positivism and the experimental method in psychology, while gaining significant recognition and appreciation (e.g., Levitt et al., 2018), can still be looked on as inferior and are not taken as seriously by some journals, funding sources, doctoral dissertation committees, and psychology faculty (Roberts & Castell, 2016).

Related to this issue is the question of “Who is to judge what is real?” In *The Phantom Tollbooth*, Rhyme and Reason, as a collaborative pair, were the judges of what was real. They carefully evaluated the worth and importance of words and numbers within the context of their society and could see that both brothers’ perceptions of number and narrative had merit. For psychological research, the same also needs to hold true—both qualitative and quantitative approaches have value and neither should be privileged, but both should be evaluated by criteria relevant to each approach. In judging qualitative research, criteria related to methodological integrity, fidelity to the subject matter, utility in reaching goals, transferability (Levitt et al., 2018), unity, simplicity, and precision (Schütz, 1962), as well as questions about who controls the data and from whose perspective the data are interpreted (Jennings et al., 2018), taken together, form a solid evaluative foundation.

I would also add another consideration, is the research valuable and to whom? Value is often held by the grant makers, admissions committees, journal editors, and traditions of a discipline—powerful voices indeed. But what about the value of research to stakeholders, those people receiving health care services, caregivers, policy makers, community residents, and the general public? Not only for qualitative researchers but an important question for all engaged in research to consider is this: Has the research question and resulting method(s) taken into consideration the interests, priorities, opinions, and experiences of those we are researching? Consulting the population we are planning to engage in research at a very early stage in its development can lead to new insights, different priorities, and a joined sense of the value of a particular study (Boivin et al., 2018). There is room in a pluralistic approach to paradigms to be more flexible and accommodating to a wider range of voices and perspectives without compromising quality, methodological integrity, trustworthiness, or transferability.

## **METHODOLOGICAL INTEGRITY: DECIDING WHAT IS GOOD QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

Although this is a textbook about qualitative methods, it is important to briefly critique and contrast three concepts that are often cited as foundations of quantitative methods and, by frequent implication, all psychological research: validity, objectivity, and reliability. It is likely these terms would be first encountered in



an undergraduate course on research methods. They are most often associated with quantitative approaches to research but regularly qualitative methods are also, problematically, assessed by these criteria. They relate to the degree of control that each purports to be necessary within a research project. Historically, this often amounts to whether the research takes place in a naturalistic context or in a regulated laboratory-like or quasi-experimental setting (Hoshmand, 1999; McGartland & Polgar, 1994). There are several problems with this conceptualization, which dichotomizes and oversimplifies the issue of validity, and with setting criteria that all psychological research must demonstrate objectivity and generalizability, thus creating artificial boundaries and falsities. A quick exploration is needed. First, this conceptualization begs the definition of “naturalistic,” a possibly outdated term because there is nothing naturalistic about a psychiatric hospital, outpatient counseling service, chronic pain clinic, cancer treatment program, art museum, large corporation, music hall, or school—all examples of settings in which psychological research has taken place. Second, there is little that is naturalistic about the actions of observing, interviewing, or testing someone. Third, elevating the laboratory and the experimental method onto a “pure” and objective plane where the values and biases of the researcher are supposedly left at the door and where statistical control ensures validity and objectivity is highly problematic. Fourth, “objectivity,” like generalizability, is a highly contested construct (Hager, 1982; Mitroff, 1972; Smaling, 1992). No experiment, no research question, and certainly no interpretation of data can possibly be truly objective. Likewise, to assess all psychological research results as to their generalizability to a wider population ignores the nuances of context and presupposes that only studies with very large sample sizes are valid, and, by default, only quantifiable information is “real” (and valuable). The types of problems we are interested in, the questions we ask, the kind of data we collect, and the analyses we undertake all emanate from some context, be it racial, socioeconomic, political, cultural, geographic, or personal. Qualitative research is particularly suited to appreciate and understand contextual aspects of stories, place, language, situation, race, gender, and lived experience.

Moving beyond the historical use of terms such as validity, objectivity, and generalizability, APA qualitative researchers have conceptualized new ways to determine (and improve) methodological integrity across different qualitative methods, for use by researchers, supervisory panels, ethics committees, dissertation examiners, and journal editors (Levitt et al., 2018):

The (Division 5) Task Force recommends the concept of methodological integrity and recommends its evaluation via its two composite processes: (a) fidelity to the subject matter, which is the process by which researchers develop and maintain allegiance to the phenomenon under study as it is conceived within their tradition of inquiry, and (b) utility in achieving research goals, which is the process by which researchers select procedures to generate insightful findings that usefully answer their research questions. (p. 2)

The process of determining methodological integrity bypasses the artificial boundaries and falsities of validity, objectivity, and generalizability to study

the human experience as Schütz (1962) and Rhyme and Reason urge, by bringing more information and experience—about ourselves as researchers and the people we study as participants—under the cloak of knowledge. A “higher power” has not provided us with psychological methods, they are not sacrosanct, and therefore should be critically assessed and reflected upon for the assumptions they bring to each research situation and the corresponding research questions.

Knowing that methods have the effect of constraining what one looks for and that “nothing is as selective as perception” (Eisner, 2003), Barker and Pistrang (Chapter 2, this volume) argue that all forms of inquiry, like all forms of representation, have their own advantages, limitations, and biases. They approach how to choose a qualitative method from a pluralist and pragmatist perspective and contend that “*pluralism* means celebrating variety—in this case, variety in research approaches—and *pragmatism* means doing what works—in this case, choosing the method that works best for the research question that you are attempting to address” (p. 27). To this end, they suggest strategies for evaluating and selecting the most appropriate qualitative method. Rather than arguing the merits of any particular approach, they take a more pluralistic strategy. Because different methods pose different, as well as complementary, strengths and weaknesses, Barker and Pistrang suggest considering a wide range of qualitative methods at an early stage of the research process, all of which fit well with concept of methodological integrity (Levitt et al., 2018).

The outcome of the research must be demonstrably shaped by the process of eliciting data, whether this is achieved by means of experimental hypothesis testing, participant input, or inductive theory building. To qualify as good-quality research, rather than casual description or uninformed interpretation, the researcher(s) must also display thoroughness; expertise in the application of the method selected; and awareness of the relevant theoretical, historical, sociocultural, and interpersonal context of the research. To demonstrate the preceding qualities, the methods used and conclusions drawn must be clearly described and carefully justified. A final pragmatic criterion for good research is that it should be meaningful and useful to at least some people, for some purposes—ideally, outside of academia. Good questions to ask in the planning stages of any research project in psychology are “How might this research have impact? What outputs—aside from a journal citation—might the research produce?” (e.g., in Chapter 5 of this volume, Fine et al. describe outputs from participatory action research).

All research, be it qualitative, mixed methods, or quantitative, seeks to tell a story to an audience. The antagonist of the story might be a public health crisis such as the emergence of HIV/AIDS or, more recently, COVID-19. A mental health problem such as rate of major depression among American adolescents or a worldwide disease like young (or early) onset dementia might equally fill this role. Profound social inequality, racism, ageism, sexism, and homophobia can all audition, and it would be a hard call to reject any of them. Protagonists could be a new medication, psychosocial intervention or a combination of

social components, specific activity and location, such as a museum or art gallery (e.g., Camic & Chatterjee, 2013) to help reduce social isolation in older people, provide new ways to think about dementia care, or help people with severe and enduring mental health problems. The audience could be a varied one—other academics, policy makers, health care planners, private insurance companies, community activists, grant funders—each with their own interests and stories to tell. I would argue that narrative in qualitative research occurs across all qualitative methodologies and, as Bamberg attests in Chapter 3 of this volume, “giving narrative . . . a prominent place within the overall frame of doing qualitative inquiry requires . . . [determining with] more clarity which aspects of our engagement with qualitative methodologies” are most valued and “which aspects of narrative inquiry do we deem particularly relevant in our overall qualitative approach, and which ‘definitions’ of narrative do we embrace as productive in pursuit of more specific research questions” (p. 51). Although I am sure this will be contentious, building a narrative qualitative psychology as an overarching cohesive framework for qualitative inquiry could provide a powerful dialogic tool to engage participants, creators of research, and its consumers and has relevance across methods discussed in the following chapters.

One issue that often frustrates and confounds those new to qualitative research is deciding on the sample size of one’s project. For example, obtaining a precise sample size is crucially relevant to statistical power but has minimal relevance to many qualitative methods. As a consequence, it is challenging to specify clear-cut common procedures for ensuring validity across all qualitative methods. Although still frequently used, checklists for evaluating the quality of qualitative studies have been shown to have significant limitations (Barbour, 2001), and their value is questionable. In Chapter 4, Malterud et al. introduce a novel approach examining sample size and suggest shared methodological principles for estimating an adequate number and type of units, events, or participants across qualitative methods. As Yardley (2000) attested, there are higher order criteria that are relevant to all forms of rigorous empirical research, whether qualitative or quantitative, and can be satisfied in very different ways by each different piece of research (Yardley, 2000). First, to qualify as empirical—in some way corresponding to what is real—research must be shown to be well-grounded in some kind of data.

John Dewey (1934), a pioneer of psychology and “pragmatic” philosophy, suggested that all inquiry and evaluation, whether scientific, moral, or common-sense, is ultimately concerned with the question of what things are good for. This question is undoubtedly of central importance to our inquiry into how the methods that are used by psychologists might profitably be expanded by the adoption of qualitative methods. Because we have suggested that qualitative methods may offer different and complementary benefits and insights from the quantitative methods used by psychologists, the following section considers what qualitative methods are particularly good for, illustrating these merits by reference to the wide range of very different approaches to qualitative research presented in the second section of this book.

## **HOW CAN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH HELP US TO UNDERSTAND THE WORLD AROUND US?**

In keeping with the tradition of qualitative research, to address this question, a personal, selective interpretation is offered of some of the themes that recur across several methods. However, this analysis is far from exhaustive or definitive but is hoped to be a solid introduction to well-known methods and innovative approaches within qualitative research in psychology, allied health sciences, and social sciences.

### **Exploration and Theory Development**

A valuable use for qualitative research, of which most quantitative researchers are aware, is as a tool for exploring a topic or problem that has not previously been researched. The logic of experimental or questionnaire research demands that the relevant variables are predefined and outcomes predicted a priori on the basis of theory. In contrast, more inductive methods, such as situational analysis (Washburn et al., Chapter 9), visual grounded theory (Griffiths, Chapter 10), and focused ethnography (Causey, Chapter 11), encourage the researcher to approach a topic without firm preconceptions about what variables will be important or how they will be related and to gradually build a theory to explain the data that are collected. Similarly, the interpretive phenomenological analysis method (Smith & Fieldsend, Chapter 8) is a method for discovering psychological meanings by identifying the essential psychological constituents or structure of an interviewee's description of an experience. However, qualitative researchers do not view such exploration as an attempt to produce an "objective" description of a phenomenon because they assign a vital role to the researcher in constructing the analytical interpretation, whether through imaginative transcendence of "taken-for-granted" meanings (Giorgi, 1970) or by applying disciplinary knowledge and theoretical sensitivity to the topic (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994).

### **Situated Analysis**

As the authors in the first section of this text point out, it is impossible to seek to maximize simultaneously both external validity (representativeness of real-world contexts) and internal validity (precision and control). Although it is misleading to make an absolute distinction between "naturalistic" and "scientific" research, it is clear that experimental research usually requires a degree of artificial manipulation or control of the key variables, whereas qualitative research typically seeks to maximize the ecological validity of the data by gathering it in real-world contexts. This latter approach permits analysis of the way in which these real-world contexts affect the phenomenon under investigation. Chapter 9 (Washburn et al.) introduces situational analysis, a methodology that produces relational, ecological, and situated understandings of meaning and inquiry of a situation as a key unit of analysis rather than focusing on individual

participants, which is done by nearly all other qualitative methods. It employs several types of situational maps to better understand the dynamics and complexities of an issue, locating it more broadly in a particular context such as, for example, medical care decision making during a pandemic, the role of mental health diagnoses in a private health care system, and where rare forms of dementia fit into international and national dementia care strategies.

On a more individual level, awareness of the fundamental influence of social context on what people say has led discourse analysts (see Potter, Chapter 7) to focus their attention on naturally occurring talk because the discursive resources and strategies people use are often quite different in everyday conversation than when speaking to a research interviewer. To gain a further understanding of the influence of context, some researchers find it helpful to immerse themselves for a prolonged period in the personal, sociocultural, or historical context of the topic they are studying (Causey, Chapter 11; Harding et al., Chapter 12).

### **Holistic Analysis of Complex, Dynamic, and Exceptional Phenomena**

Qualities are emergent properties arising from the configuration of elements in a whole. Hence, qualitative research is necessarily holistic; microanalysis of parts is always undertaken in the context of a larger whole. For example, the discussion of how applied ethnography can be integrated into psychological research provided by Causey in Chapter 11 involves the innovative use of line drawing as an investigative method. He describes how scrutinous drawing can be employed to “focus on using of the act of drawing as a process of perception” (p. XXX) rather than to focus on the picture created. Using a mixed-methods approach, Harding et al. (Chapter 12) analyzes in detail a day in the life of people with dementia-related visual impairment living within a home environment using focused ethnography, interviews, and neuropsychological testing to explore how the challenges in these intersecting environments are navigated in real time and in the social and relational context in which they occur, while also exploring how a variety of data sources might contribute to this understanding.

Using mixed methods is not straightforward, however. Qualitative methods can be treated as subsidiaries to quantitative work, an approach that is unable to maximize the potential of both methods (Marecek, 2003). Moreover, quantitative and qualitative methods often are premised on divergent epistemological bases and may produce contradictory sets of outcomes. Nevertheless, inclusion within a single study of both qualitative and quantitative methods can be helped by developing more pragmatic, integrative paradigms (Yardley & Bishop, 2007) justified on the grounds that interlacing methods, even when they yield disparate findings, enrich our understanding of human behavior (Rabinowitz & Weseen, 2001). By touching on different aspects of the same phenomena, two (or more) methodological approaches yield a more complete story. Additionally, besides being able to stand on their own as independent methods, qualitative approaches can be part of a “stepped approach” to understanding a

particular problem or issue, occurring before a larger scale quantitative study or as a poststudy analysis to discover more about how and why an intervention or activity worked well or failed to have an impact, among other pertinent questions. Qualitative approaches are exceptionally compatible with the development stage of planned behavior change interventions. As discussed by Yardley et al. in Chapter 13, “qualitative approaches to exploring and analyzing experiences of behavior change interventions are particularly well suited to understanding the complexity of such interventions” (p. 263) by being used in feasibility trials to detect components of intervention protocols that need to be better understood.

In qualitative research, collection of very detailed data about just a few examples of a phenomenon—even a single case, as can occur within interpretive phenomenological analysis (Chapter 8)—permits analysis of multiple aspects of a topic. A period of observation or series of interviews typically yields an intimidatingly vast repository of data about a multitude of interacting elements and aspects of the topic studied. Inevitably, qualitative researchers must be selective in their analysis, but freedom from the restrictive constraints of meeting statistical assumptions (McGrath & Johnson, 2003) permits consideration of fine distinctions, exceptions, and complex patterns of interrelationships. Qualitative data also allow researchers to develop multilayered interpretations by returning to the data to carry out multiple analyses of different aspects of the topics, which can be contextualized by the other analyses (Barker & Pistrang, Chapter 2). For example, Griffiths (Chapter 10) analyzes video recordings of nonverbal and verbal interaction to develop *attuning*, a theory of interaction of people with severe and multiple disabilities and their caregivers “whereby communication partners move symmetrically or asymmetrically towards or away from each cognitively and emotionally” (Griffiths & Smith, 2016, p. 130). Video and grounded theory are used to present “a method of qualitative inquiry that enables an understanding of how individuals behave by not only delving into their verbal texts but also by considering visual as well as aural forms of data” (Griffiths, Chapter 10, this volume, p. 188). The narratives that Griffiths explores are the often ignored nonverbal narratives “characterized by behaviors that are seen as fleeting, small, and unimportant.” The use of video and video analysis in qualitative psychological research is an expanding frontier that allows diverse ways to obtain data and perform different types of analysis, including micro-analysis to examine deviation, inconsistency, and omission.

Whereas in quantitative research inconsistency is treated as error and nonresponse as missing data, in discourse analysis (Potter, Chapter 7) and psychoanalytical analysis (Kvale, 1996), for example, the internal contradictions, pauses, and absences in people’s talk are valuable pointers to important areas of tension, difficulty, or conflict; deviations from typical or “normal” behavior provide particularly useful information about cultural norms and the reasons for and consequences of transgressing these. The dynamic complexity added by the dimension of temporal change is also fundamental to many forms of qualitative research. Murray (Chapter 6) explains how people’s narratives embody the dynamics of their identity by simultaneously shaping the past



and projecting into the future; hence, narrative analysis provides an intrinsically chronological perspective on the lives of narrators.

### **Analysis of Subjective Meaning**

One way of thinking about the difference—and complementarity—between quantitative and qualitative research is to consider quantitative research as the process of producing a map of a place and qualitative research as the process of producing a video of that place. A map is extremely useful; it conveys with economy and precision the location of a place and its relationship to other places in terms of proximity and direction. However, even the most detailed map is unable to convey an understanding of what it is like to be at that place. In contrast, a video conveys in vivid detail the constantly changing perspective of the observer. Although this perspective is selective and could not easily be used for navigation, it is able to communicate something of the subjective experience of being there. This capacity of qualitative research to gain partial access to the subjective perspectives of others therefore makes it an ideal method for research into subjective meaning, whether this consists of abstracting the psychological core of an experience (Smith & Fieldsend, Chapter 8); “studying how psychological issues and objects are constructed, understood, and conveyed in the many interactions across public displays, constructions, and orientations of people” (Potter, Chapter 7); or using video analysis and grounded theory to understand the subjective experience, feelings, and communication of those with extremely limited cognitive ability (Clare et al., 2020; Griffiths, Chapter 10, this volume).

Although subjectivity has often been associated with bias that must be contained and reduced, Gough and Madill (2012) suggested that researchers consider “the benefits of a more . . . reflexive scientific attitude” that involve accommodating participant subjectivity and reflexively working with researcher subjectivity, where relevant to the theories, research question, and methodology being used in a particular study. Their multiple suggestions allow numerous ways for researchers to consider subjectivity as a dynamic part of research and is an exciting development that can better incorporate it “as a valuable resource that can be tapped to illuminate both the phenomenon under investigation and to situate research design and practices more generally” (p. 382).

Just as making a video is not a matter of random or neutral recording but rather of aesthetically framing a sequence of scenes to convey a particular impression to a viewer, the analysis of subjective meaning contains aesthetic and interpersonal dimensions (Washburn et al., Chapter 9) that are largely absent—if not excluded—from the process of quantitative research.

### **Relational Analysis and Reflexivity**

Undertaking situated, holistic analysis of meaning does not simply entail considering multiple aspects of a phenomenon and contextual influences; rather, it implies a fundamentally relational approach to the topic and to research

itself. Qualitative research therefore requires an appreciation of the relationships of all participants in the research with each other and with the wider society in which they are embedded. For example, Miller et al. (2003) explained how ethnography always entails at least double vision because the process of trying to understand another culture inevitably involves contrasting it with one's own culture so that insight is gained simultaneously into the taken-for-granted assumptions and interpretive frameworks of both cultures. Likewise, Causey (Chapter 11) and Harding et al. (Chapter 12) draw on forms of ethnography, along with other methods, to examine and challenge the ways we understand the culture of going psychological research and the culture of those living with a dementia, respectively.

Discourse analysis, another form of qualitative research, is founded on relational analysis. Discourse can be analyzed relationally in several ways (e.g., Wetherell et al., 2000). First, the intrinsically relational nature of linguistic meaning can be a focus for study; for example, how terms such as *migrant* or *male* take their meaning from their relation to the terms *citizen* and *female*. Second, discourse can be analyzed as dialogue or social interaction. Discursive psychology (Potter, Chapter 7) examines the ways in which meanings and effects are coproduced in interactions, playing close attention to how this process of coconstruction is influenced by the context of the setting in which the dialogue takes place. For example, in a country that has a historically negative view of socialism or is invested in painting any form of socialism as dangerous without attention to the vast differences across socialistic approaches to government, an account of a country's political leader promoting a private, high-cost health care system could take the meaning and have the effect of an excuse to avoid exploring who does not benefit from such a system if offered in the context of the discourse that "universal health care for all is socialism." If those who see universal health care as "socialistic" politely sympathized with the leader, they help to construct the political leader as blameless. A third implicit context for all discourse is the wider sociocultural and rhetorical context in which such coconstructions take place. For example, the account is more likely to be successful in constructing such political leaders as blameless if they are relatively powerful, or a core group member, than if they are low-status outsiders—and if the account can draw on effective rhetorical resources (e.g., humorously depicting the people who cannot afford to pay health care premiums as feckless and criticism of the leader as unfair and undemocratic).

Murray (Chapter 6) notes that the influence of sociocultural context on apparently personal narratives is so profound that it shapes our identity and consciousness, furnishing the roles and plotlines that we use to live in a way that makes coherent sense to ourselves and to those with whom we interact. For example, exemplifying a critical participatory action research (CPAR) perspective, a collective of female researchers and inmates at a New York state prison and local universities (Fine et al., Chapter 5) look back over a 25-year period and show how inmates' narratives depicting themselves as dual personalities—the "old, bad" and "new, transformed" selves—did not simply reproduce negative social stereotypes of criminals but facilitated the development of a reflective



agency that allowed the women to condemn the crimes they had committed in the past while articulating a positive identity for the present and future. Fine et al. (Chapter 5) highlight CPAR elements:

the research is deeply rooted in community; designed by collectives of academics and community members; centers on the perspectives of those most impacted; integrates evidence from history, statistics, and narratives; and results in publishing and disseminating ‘products’ that are scholarly, policy-oriented, and accessible to the local community. (p. 98)

Awareness of the constructive nature of talk is most explicit in forms of discourse analysis but has much wider relevance. All psychological studies involve humans who are speaking and acting in a social and linguistic context, and so qualitative researchers whose interest is not solely in language nevertheless find it useful to consider the sociolinguistic processes influencing the talk and action they are studying. For example, enriching a grounded theory study with consideration of different interpretative perspectives on the themes that had emerged, including perspectives that analyzed these themes as discursive practices (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003), allowed researchers to consider participants’ statements about “valuing trees” not simply as expressing personal opinions about vegetation but as tapping into and constructing systems of symbolic and social value in which trees were associated with life and health.

For many qualitative researchers, awareness of sociocultural context and interpersonal relations necessarily extends to a reflexive consideration of the role of the researcher, the relationship between researcher and participants, and the influence of the researcher on the research process (Fine et al., Chapter 5; Gilligan et al., 2003). This requires researchers to attend to their own responses to the interviewee’s narrative—partly to ensure that the voice of the interviewee is not distorted or submerged by the emotional response of the researcher, but also because, as in psychoanalysis, the analyst’s reactions provide a valuable empathic link to the subjective experience of the interviewee. Kvale (2003) highlighted additional features of the psychoanalytical relationship from which researchers might profit, suggesting that the close, embodied interaction between analyst and patient fosters intuitive and bodily modes of knowing and provides a wealth of information that is absent from the “psychology of strangers” constructed from single “snapshot” encounters with research participants. Both Kvale (2003) and Murray (Chapter 6, this volume) welcome the opportunity provided by narrative and interview methods for interviewees to exert control and influence, setting the agenda and entering into dialogue with the interviewer to reject interpretations that do not make sense to them.

As this section has made clear, qualitative research methods can be extraordinarily useful, providing unique access into our understanding of the human experience. In a sense, the chapters in this volume enable psychologists to circle above the patchworked landscape of various qualitative approaches, noting their different hues and shared boundaries. It is only when researchers are on the ground and meaningfully using the methods, however, that they can fully experience their texture, affordances, and constraints. Moving from the negative stereotypes of qualitative research to a more balanced approach has begun

in North America and elsewhere. As students are exposed to qualitative methods alongside quantitative methods, my experience has been that they better appreciate the relative strengths and limits of both approaches. To this end, it is exciting to see psychology departments continuing to incorporate qualitative methods courses that provide the same meticulous level of detail as the courses that are typically offered in quantitative methods. The final section of this chapter offers encouragement to academic psychology to take up this challenge and provide more teaching resources in qualitative methods.

### **The Temporal in Qualitative Research**

Much of the data collection for qualitative research in psychology has taken place at one point in time. A research participant's experience or understanding of a personal event, circumstance, situation, discourse, or perspective is too often collected as a data source during one interview or observation. There have been exceptions, of course, and they are worth noting. Narrative analysis (Chapter 6) seeks to understand stories over time; ethnography and applied ethnography (Chapters 11 and 12) look at long-term and briefer time periods, respectively; and participatory action research (Chapter 5), by its design as an action-oriented methodology, always collects data over time. Situational analysis (Chapter 9) examines complex phenomena that exist in a dynamic context that develops over time. All of these methodologies explore change over time.

In going forward, one area in which qualitative analysis can be developed and expanded is in its use as a longitudinal methodology. Collecting information from one participant at a given point in time is often the bulk of doctoral level data as well as many published works using qualitative methodologies (e.g., interpretive phenomenological analysis, discourse analysis, thematic analysis, conversational analysis, grounded theory). To further advance qualitative inquiry and to deepen our understanding of change—about an issue, topic, area, or phenomenon—using multiple data collection points over a period of time would enhance our knowledge and provide a wealth of more nuanced information. Admittedly, this would in itself would be more time-consuming for hard-pressed students and established researchers and create cost and accessibility implications. Yet longitudinal qualitative research also permits more options to better explore the concept of change; describe and analyze the dynamics of interpersonal interaction; provide research participants more opportunity to reflect, review, and summarize in a different way than the imposed limitations of a one-off research encounter; and better explore the concept of change (e.g., Carduff et al., 2015; Holland et al., 2006; Morrow & Crivello, 2015; Neale, 2018). Harding et al. (Chapter 12) provide an example of different types of data collected over the course of 1 day rather than the usual 1- to 2-hour period seen in many qualitative reports. Focused ethnography also offers an approach to longitudinal research that is applicable to some areas of psychology (Simonds et al., 2012).

### Ethics in Qualitative Research

Ethical decision making across all health, social, and psychological research is an essential component of a successful project. It should not be a secondary consideration but one that is central to the research question, recruitment decisions, choice of methods, data collection processes, analysis, and dissemination. Although APA's *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (2017) and the British Psychological Society's *Code of Human Research Ethics* (2014), for example, thoroughly address the basics of research ethics, neither document provides sufficient guidance for qualitative researchers. For both new and seasoned researchers, there are, however, additional resources that can provide useful information about some of the key ethical issues to consider when conducting qualitative research (e.g., Sanjari et al., 2014). Some of these issues are methodology-specific, whereas others go across most, if not all, qualitative research. Each chapter in this book addresses ethics as related to its respective topic area, but overarching issues to consider are addressed in this section.

Compared with quantitative research, the qualitative researcher will take on different roles depending on the methodology used, but cutting across all qualitative research is the importance of the reflective research practitioner (Mortari, 2015). Qualitative researchers are in powerful positions when interacting with research participants. They are interpreting the lives, words, experiences, actions, and opinions of other people who will sometimes be vulnerable, at risk, societal outsiders, and with limited abilities and resources. Understanding the dynamics of an inherently unequal relationship can result in a higher quality, more equitable project that comes closer to capturing what the research has set out to do. It's not that quantitative researchers are not reflective, but in qualitative research, reflective practice is essential to the conduct of the research and for that reason it is also part of good ethical practice. Most people reading this book, and particularly psychologists, would have likely encountered quantitative methods in the past. This may have created a worldview of how research and science should be structured and understood (e.g., Cooper et al., 2012), and at first glance qualitative approaches may seem unscientific because they do not use statistical analysis and often have small sample sizes. Yet because qualitative research asks different types of questions than quantitative research, it needs to use different tools to ensure quality, rigor, and trustworthiness, all part of ethical practice. Because qualitative approaches rely on subjectivity and the close involvement of the researcher at every stage of the research (Tracy, 2010), reflexivity becomes an important facilitative and analytic tool. Reflexivity involves a

continuing mental process consisting of intentional thinking and critical analysis of knowledge and experience, directed towards attaining a deep understanding of the meanings people ascribe to their assumptions about human behaviours and experiences, and about the world. (Goldblatt & Band-Winterstein, 2016, p. 101)

Students can be helped to develop reflective practice through discussions with teachers and supervisors but can also be assisted by other students.

Similarly, a seasoned research team's engagement in reflective practice helps bring to light the assumptions each member brings to the research and how the team understands and interprets the material they encounter across the entire research process.

Another important issue to consider is the researcher's interaction with a research participant. Unless previously collected data, such as historical or archival materials, are exclusively being used in a project, the researcher will be directly engaging with human participants, often asking highly personal and probing questions in a one-on-one meeting or group format. Consideration needs to be given to question development and the potential assumptions underlying each question. A few examples may be helpful here. When interviewing a person with a learning disability (LD), "What assumptions and knowledge does the interviewer hold about LD?" "How do they understand the construction of LD as a diagnostic category of people who will have a range of abilities?" "In what environments and situations has the researcher previously encountered people with LD?" And if someone being interviewed is Black, a lesbian, or holds highly conservative religious views, "What are the researcher's personal understandings, experiences, and thoughts about these groups of people?" It's not so much a matter of "right" or "wrong" opinions or trying to be "politically correct" that is an ethical concern, but that unexplored and unexamined, personally held assumptions may well alter the questions we ask and influence our analyses. Likewise, a Hispanic researcher interviewing people from a Hispanic community group will also need to critically reflect on their held assumptions about the people, neighborhood, and situation involved in their research. A White liberal university student interviewing an anti-abortion activist, as another example, will need to think long and hard about what they are bringing to the research relationship before developing their interview questions and undertaking their analyses. These issues are part of an ethical reflective practice and are a cornerstone in the development of a successful qualitative project.

The issue of confidentiality is important to all research involving human participants, but within many qualitative projects, there are additional considerations. Transcripts of interviews (Chapters 5–9); text from historical and other written records, including social media; and visual information such as photographs, videos (Chapters 10 and 12), and drawings (Chapter 11) are all sources of highly detailed accounts of people's lives. Transcripts and other texts will need careful scrutiny to make sure personally identifying information is removed or, if it is essential to include, to make participants clearly aware of this during the recruitment phase of the project and to use these data only with carefully informed, written consent. Using visual data that identifies or potentially identifies participants will require specific approval by ethics committees along with written consent from participants making them clearly aware of what will be visually captured and how it will be used (e.g., dissertation, conference slides, journal publication, community engagement). In an increasingly visually oriented world, it becomes more likely that visual data will appear alongside written data and the implications for advancing qualitative research are

tremendous, but this should never be done without participants being fully aware. Researchers should also consider whether visual information that does not reveal the identity of people (e.g., side or rear head-shot views, views of hands and arms, blurred faces) will be sufficient and dramatically reduce confidentiality risks.

Protecting the confidentiality and unanimity of research participants—and those around them—within specific research settings (e.g., clinic, school, neighborhood, rural community, business) where data were obtained can prove challenging. Sometimes referred to as deductive disclosure, research participants who have consented may unwittingly convey characteristics of others that can lead to their identification, causing strains and difficulties with other people not involved directly in the research. Kaiser (2009) provided a reenvisioning of the consent process that considers an “alternative approach to reduce the uncertainty of detailed data that might lead to deductive disclosure” (p. 7). She accomplished this by involving research participants as part of the “audience” that the research may affect and inviting them, postinterview, to complete a confidentiality form further specifying what information they accept to be released and what details from the interview they wished to alter to protect their and others’ confidentiality.

## **TEACHING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

At the time the first edition of this book was published in 2003, few psychology departments in North America or Europe taught qualitative research as a regular part of their curriculum in research methods. Nearly 20 years later, a good deal of progress has been made in teaching qualitative research methods and in supervising theses and dissertations using qualitative methodologies. In North America, APA’s Division 5: Quantitative and Qualitative Methods (American Psychological Association, n.d.) offers sample syllabi in qualitative methods, and in the United Kingdom, the accreditation section of the British Psychological Society (2017) requires all undergraduate degree programs in psychology to offer qualitative methods teaching, although “many programs still providing little more than tokenistic engagement with qualitative methods” (Gibson & Sullivan, 2018, p. 197). Qualitative methods are not routinely taught in every UK PhD program in psychology, but they are taught in nearly all doctoral programs in clinical psychology. Ignoring methodology that does not fall under the umbrella of positivism is the most significant barrier that impedes new generations of psychologists from understanding and appreciating different ways to examine the phenomena most often studied by psychology. At the undergraduate and graduate levels, room can still be made in the curriculum to incorporate the study of different paradigms and research traditions. The result of this curriculum expansion will be a richer and more substantially encompassing profession that is better able to respond to the increasing complex questions of our times.

Starting at the undergraduate level, an introductory research methods class could begin with an examination of the assumptions of positivist, postpositivist, constructivist, and interpretive paradigms and introduce qualitative methodologies, as discussed in Chapter 2. Using the tenets of problem-based learning, a specific problem (e.g., assessing psychotherapy outcome, determining well-being across stages of dementias, evaluating psychology trauma services) could be used to engage the class in discussion about how best to research these situations. Each paradigm could be treated as a separate “case” that students could decipher and debate. From this comparative beginning, the class could then go on to discover some of the research methods emanating from each paradigm. This would entail examining the questions that each method can and cannot answer. Rather than teaching just one methodological paradigm or epistemological position, this approach encourages students to think more critically about why and how one specific method is chosen over another. This pedagogical approach also encourages students to think about the questions to ask before considering the design and method(s) of the study. A further advanced, optional course in qualitative methods could be another offering in the final year of study.

In graduate education, one master’s level course could provide more in-depth information about several of the qualitative methods presented in Chapters 5 to 12 and allow students to obtain some hands-on experience in data collection and analysis in one or two of those methods. At the doctoral level, a two-course sequence that integrates quantitative and qualitative methods could begin a student’s research training, followed by two additional research methods classes focused on more advanced methods of design and analysis, in either qualitative or quantitative approaches. Chapters 13 and 14 would work well for students at an advanced stage in their doctoral studies. A capstone research seminar could act as an integrative final experience where student projects are presented and discussed across qualitative and quantitative designs. Helping graduate students develop an integrative perspective about research methods gives them a wider range of intellectual tools and, along with some of the wisdom of princesses Rhyme and Reason, realize the limitations of adhering to a methodological hierarchy that prevents a richer understanding of human beings.

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