

As the conception of what marketing is has evolved, so must the methods of inquiry also evolve. Marketing now is viewed as a socially constructed enterprise. Thus, what is needed are inputs from the humanistic modes of inquiry developed specifically to address socially constructed phenomena. The author discusses three central aspects of humanistic inquiry, (1) the philosophy and metaphysics of humanism, (2) the methodology of humanistic research, and (3) the criteria appropriate for evaluating studies conducted in the humanistic mode. Humanistic inquiry is compared specifically with the positivist approach currently used by most marketing researchers. Guidelines are provided to assist researchers who may wish to implement the humanistic approach in their own research programs.

Humanistic Inquiry in Marketing Research: Philosophy, Method, and Criteria

Marketing scholars currently are engaged in an important ideological and intellectual debate about the nature of marketing as a science or, perhaps more accurately, the type of science that marketing should become and the type of methods marketing researchers should use. One primary subject of controversy has been the value of *relativism* in the philosophy of science utilized in marketing (Anderson 1983; Deshpande 1983; Peter and Olson 1983). Though relativism *per se* does not constitute an ontology or a methodology, the issues it raises about the socially constructed and context-bound nature of human knowledge have generated consideration of various philosophical traditions and methodological avenues that earlier would have been viewed as unacceptable within the boundaries of marketing science.

Relativist philosophical approaches to knowledge acquisition, such as phenomenology (cf. Husserl 1960, 1973; Spiegelberg 1969), subjectivism (cf. Berkeley 1971; Diesing 1982), and existentialism (cf. Sartre 1966, 1976) have been available for many years, but are rarely evident in marketing research. Similarly, participant-observation methods, long in use by ethnographers, cultural

anthropologists, and sociologists, are seldom used as primary data sources in studies reported in the *Journal of Marketing Research*. During the last three decades only one empirical study reported in the *Journal of Marketing* has made explicit use of a nonpositivist method, Levy's (1981) "Interpreting Consumer Mythology." The reasons for ignoring these methods are likely embedded in marketing's long-term normative commitment to the metaphysics and method of positivist science.

Early in its development as an inquiry system, marketing was equated with the transport of generic commodities to the marketplace (Wright and Dimsdale 1974) and with economic criteria such as profitability, cost minimization, and marginal returns. This empirical emphasis on physical distribution logistics and pragmatic economic issues, such as transport efficiency, linked marketing research harmoniously with the positivist theories then in vogue, which were concerned with mechanics, resource utilization, equilibria, and physical dispersion systems (Collins 1983).

Even as marketing thought subsequently evolved through *institutionalism* (cf. Cox 1950), *functionalism* (cf. Alderson 1957; McGarry 1950), and *behavioralism* (cf. Kotler 1965; Mullen 1963, 1964; Stern 1969) as successive ideological bases, it held fast to the positivist methods and metaphysics originating in the physical sciences. Empiricism, realism, and quantificationism remained the guiding norms of marketing as a science, even as the conceptualization of marketing phenomena grew

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to recognize the importance of situational context, the subjectivity of perception, and the constructed nature of human reality.

As the conception of what marketing *is* has evolved, so must the methods of inquiry also evolve. Marketing now is viewed as a socially constructed enterprise. Thus, what is needed are inputs from the *humanistic* modes of inquiry developed specifically to address socially constructed phenomena. The following sections discuss three central aspects of humanistic inquiry, (1) the philosophy and metaphysic of humanism, (2) the methodology of humanistic research, and (3) the criteria appropriate for evaluating studies conducted in the humanistic mode. Humanistic inquiry is compared specifically with the positivist approach currently in use by most marketing researchers. Guidelines are provided to assist researchers who may wish to implement the humanistic approach in their own research programs.

HUMANISTIC INQUIRY

Humanism, as an inquiry approach, differs markedly from the methods used in the physical sciences because it advocates *in-dwelling* of the researcher with the phenomena¹ under investigation. Rather than standing apart from the system being studied, the researcher immerses the self within it. Researcher understanding, therefore, is deemed within the humanist perspective to arise from direct personal experience, rather than by the manipulation of experimental variables. The researcher serves as the measuring instrument; personally experienced knowledge serves as scientific data (Polanyi 1962).

The Humanist Philosophy

Though science and religion frequently are said to be fundamentally disparate approaches to knowledge acquisition, there is one aspect in which they are similar. Scientific philosophies and religious ideologies both are based on a set of primary assumptions (axioms) that are accepted on faith; that is, they are based on *beliefs about the nature of reality* whose truth or falsity is not subject to empirical test (Wagner 1984; Wagner and Berger 1985).

Wagner (1984) refers to these basic sets of beliefs in the social sciences as *orienting strategies*.

Similar to Kuhn's paradigms, beliefs of this sort provide guidelines or strategies for understanding social phenomena and suggest the proper orientation of the theorist to

these phenomena. . . . Orienting strategies are exceptionally stable, sometimes even rigid, in structure. . . . One orienting strategy is seldom, if ever replaced by another . . . [rather] new strategies . . . add to the list of metatheoretical options that are available. . . . Part of the reason for the rigidity both within and among these strategies is that [their] differences are fundamental. The claims of an orienting strategy are directives; they are statements about values, not statements about facts. Such prescriptive arguments are largely nonempirical, and conflicts between them are often unresolvable. . . . Put directly, most of the claims of an orienting strategy *cannot be validated as either true or false*; instead they are accepted or rejected a priori without [the possibility of] recourse to conclusive empirical argument (Wagner and Berger 1985, p. 701-2).

The metaphysic underlying humanistic inquiry constitutes an orienting strategy, such as that described by Wagner. Humanistic inquiry is based on a set of fundamental beliefs the scientist has about the nature of reality. In essence, they define what phenomena the scientist *believes* to be knowable, the way in which phenomena may become known, and criteria for evaluating what becomes known. The fundamental beliefs of humanistic inquiry are (Denzin 1983; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Morgan 1983c, e):

1. Human beings construct multiple realities. These realities can be comprehended only as *gestalts*, that is, holistically.
2. The researcher and the phenomenon under study are mutually interactive. The researcher cannot "distance" the self from the phenomenon nor can the phenomenon be understood without the personal involvement of the researcher.
3. The aim of research inquiry should be the development of an idiographic body of knowledge consisting of tentative statements about a particular phenomenon. That is, the researcher should strive to construct a "thick description" (Geertz 1973) of the phenomenon under study, which describes its complexity and internally constructed meaning.
4. Because phenomena are engaged in a process of continuous creation, it is meaningless to designate one set of phenomenal aspects as "causes" and another set as "effects."
5. Research inquiry is inherently value-laden because researcher values inevitably influence the choice of *phenomenon*, choice of *method*, choice of *data*, and choice of *findings*.
6. Research inquiry is a social construction resulting from the subjective interaction between the researcher and the phenomenon. Thus, knowledge is subjectively attained; knowledge is *constructed*, not *discovered*.

The axioms outlined are virtually the converse of those adhered to by most marketing researchers. Marketing inquiry traditionally has been based on positivist science (Anderson 1983; Peter and Olson 1983). Briefly, positivist science is premised on axioms that assume (1) a single, tangible reality consisting of discrete elements, (2) the division of discrete elements into causes and ef-

¹The term "phenomenon," as used here, refers to the subject matter about which the researcher is inquiring. In traditional humanistic inquiry, this subject matter usually would be a *social unit* (e.g., a subculture, a society, an individual, an organization, a community), a *social process* (e.g., mating, eating, fighting, buying, dying), or a *social product* (e.g., art works, literature, housing, apparel, music, motion pictures). Thus, humanistic inquiry usually has as its focus some aspect of *human nature*, creativity, or life. However, as Geertz (1983a) has noted, there has been in recent years such a blurring of genres between the physical and social sciences that "one waits only for quantum theory in verse or biography in algebra" (p. 20).

fects, (3) independence between researcher and phenomenon, (4) the possibility and desirability of developing statements of truth that are generalizable across time and context, and (5) the possibility and desirability of value-free, objective knowledge discovery (Hunt 1983; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Outhwaite 1983). The contrasts between the positivistic and humanistic philosophies are stated in the following table.

<i>The humanistic metaphysic</i>	<i>The positivistic metaphysic</i>
1. Human beings construct multiple realities.	1. There is a single reality composed of discrete elements.
2. Researcher and phenomenon are mutually interactive.	2. The researcher and the phenomenon are independent.
3. Research inquiry is directed toward the development of idiographic knowledge.	3. It is possible and desirable to develop statements of truth that are generalizable across time and context.
4. Phenomenal aspects cannot be segregated into "causes and effects."	4. Elements of reality can be segregated into causes and effects.
5. Inquiry is inherently value-laden.	5. It is possible and desirable to discover value-free objective knowledge.

Though attempts have been made to merge or at least seek a compromise between these two viewpoints (cf. Campbell as cited by Cook and Reichardt 1979), it appears neither possible nor appropriate to do so. Because each is based on an essentially dialectic set of fundamental beliefs, humanistic inquiry and positivistic inquiry can no more be merged or integrated than can Buddhism and Mohammedanism.

For a researcher, once a personal decision has been made as to whether one believes more strongly in the humanist or the positivist view of reality, the methodology and evaluative criteria employed will follow one direction or the other as a result of that commitment.² A researcher cannot be committed to the humanist metaphysic and continue to rely on controlled experimentation or causal path analysis. Similarly, a positivist researcher cannot utilize experiential participant observation and construct interpretive descriptions. The metaphysic one adopts ineluctably dictates the science one practices.³

²It is important to clarify that the contrasts presented are between humanism and positivism as alternative inquiry modes. The choices described do not directly involve *relativism*, which does not promote one method over another.

³For some readers the foregoing statements are likely to raise disquieting questions to which there are few comforting answers. Can positivism and humanism coexist? Yes, they can and will continue to coexist, as they have for centuries. However, the balance of power between adherents to each world view will shift back and forth between the two within academic disciplines and scientific communities. Like adherents to alternative religious ideologies, positivists and hu-

The operational problems and intellectual confusion that result from attempting to enter humanistic methodology into a positivist ideological framework are evident in a recent article by Bonoma (1985). Though Bonoma advocates the increased use of case studies and other "qualitative" research methods in marketing research, he judges their worth by positivist criteria such as objectivity, quantifiability, and error variance. He assumes the determination of cause and effect to be the highest goal of science and equates data integrity with the control afforded by laboratory experimentation. Naturally, within such a framework, humanistic methods such as the case study are seen as tainted by researcher subjectivity and measurement bias. They are viewed primarily as hypothesis-generation devices whose results would be validated by more rigorous quantitative procedures.

Such a characterization perpetuates long-held stereotypes about the nature and utility of humanistic methods—that they are good for generating ideas, but inadequate for rigorous theory-testing applications. More importantly, it obfuscates the very real divisions between humanist and positivist science. Methods such as the case study derive from the humanistic metaphysic. They are a complete and internally consistent approach to the theory construction, testing, and revision process when used competently by a researcher. They are neither inferior to nor dependent on positivist methods. Rather, humanistic inquiry provides a *parallel path* in relation to the positivist method for acquiring marketing knowledge.

manists rely on the techniques of proselytization and internal indoctrination to gain adherents to their metaphysical world views. Thus the author predicts the imminent onset of some interesting intellectual struggles in doctoral training programs, similar in intensity to those surfacing in recent marketing and consumer research theory conferences. Can one researcher practice humanistic and positivistic science simultaneously? To do so would seem to be extremely difficult (if not impossible). It is unlikely that a humanistic scientist could or would place faith in the results he or she obtained from a classic double-blind experiment. Similarly, it is difficult to envision a positivistic scientist believing that the knowledge gained from a direct, personal conversation with a consumer could reveal general truths about the nature of reality. Each scientist has placed his or her faith in a given way of knowing and, though one might practice (or feign to practice) an alternative way of knowing, it is doubtful that he or she would really *believe* in the answers it provides.

However, this does not mean that positivist and humanist researchers should not make use of each other's findings to supplement their own knowledge. Many, perhaps most, humanist researchers would be heartened by positivist survey or experimental data that support aspects of an interpretation they had constructed. Similarly, many, perhaps most, positivist researchers would welcome humanistic interpretive findings that reinforce propositions for which they had found empirical support. It is not that positivists and humanists believe each other's research to be without value; rather it is that each group places its faith in a different ideology for *creating knowledge*. For an interesting example of the interplay between humanist and positivist ways of knowing, see Triandis (1972, p. 308–11; Triandis et al. 1984, p. 1374), who shows how a positivist researcher incorporates direct personal experience to supplement and verify his empirical results.

The Humanistic Method

In sharp contrast to positivist science—where the researcher attempts to distance the self from the object of investigation—the humanistic method *requires participation* on the part of the investigator. As Kaplan (1984, p. 33) states,

Effective observation of human affairs is virtually impossible without some degree of participation in what is being observed; there are not many one-way mirrors, and what can be learned by stooping to keyholes is of dubious scientific worth. Without participation, data, even if somehow made visible, remain cryptic.

The outcome of the humanistic method is an *interpretation* of the phenomenon about which one is inquiring. There appear to be two processes upon which the effective investigator must rely in constructing a veridical interpretation—intuition and empathy. Empathy is required because the investigator must be able to learn the others' reality, to understand how they think, feel, and believe.⁴ The comprehension attained through investigator empathy next must be combined with personal intuition to arrive at an interpretation.

Intuition also enables the investigator to translate comprehension of the phenomenon into knowledge that can be transferred to the audience with which he or she wants to communicate, for instance, other investigators (Geertz 1983b). Levy (1981) provides an instructive example of this intuitive interpretation process. On the basis of empathic interviews with housewives, Levy constructed an interpretation of the meanings of various food items to consumers. This interpretation then was communicated to the audience of marketing research readers by means of diagrams and descriptive concepts, which constituted their "language." In essence, then, to be successful with this procedure, one must be not only an empathetic participant observer, but also an empathetic participant translator.

Geertz (1983b) refers to this type of observation → translation process as involving two sets of concepts, experience-near and experience-distant. *Experience-near* concepts are those used by the people being observed to describe themselves, their lives, and their values. For example, among American consumers experience-near concepts might be "happy," "rich," and "popular." For the social scientist-scholars to whom the researcher is reporting his or her observational interpretation of American consumers, these same terms might be translated

into the *experience-distant* concepts of "positive affective mood," "materially affluent," and "socially extroverted," which are the specialized, abstract jargon of the scientific community.

To implement the humanist method requires a series of steps that differ in both form and content from those followed in positivist science. They are described in detail in the following subsections.

Step 1. A priori conceptualization. For both humanist and positivist researchers, the first step is the conceptualization of a phenomenon for study. In both types of inquiry, researchers often are guided initially by their own curiosity and innate interest in a specific topic. However, each has a different *conceptualization* of the phenomenon to be investigated. The positivist researcher is likely to have an *a priori* scheme of the phenomenon as being composed of discrete elements (i.e., variables) that are embedded in a causal network. This mental schema guides the positivist scientist to designate certain elements as causes and others as effects and to concentrate on identifying the precise relationships between them. The "mass" or social context in which the variables are embedded recedes into the background of the scientist's mental awareness, as conceptual attention and empirical observation necessarily become fixed on the foreground variables of interest.

In contrast, the humanist investigator constructs a very different *a priori* mental conceptualization. The phenomenon is likely to be envisaged as a large, indistinct *mass* whose texture, sources of cohesion, and content the researcher wants to learn. There is no seeking after cause and effect or desire to provide causal explanation, but rather a desire to discern the nature of the phenomenon. What the humanist researcher desires is to comprehend and interpret this "mass," to grasp its meanings in their entirety.⁵

The *a priori* conceptualizations of the positivist researcher and the humanist researcher differ because they are derived from two dialectical metaphysics; what it is *possible to conceive* about a phenomenon and the nature of that conceptualization are based on each researcher's beliefs about truth and knowledge. Where these beliefs differ, *a priori* conceptualizations of the phenomenon of interest also will differ.

A positivist researcher investigating a consumer subculture might envisage the task as one of identifying exogenous background variables (e.g., socioeconomic status, geographic locale, and recency of immigration), which might influence group members' relative social mobility, achievement motivation, and materialism, which in turn may contribute to the group's preferences for certain types of apparel, home furnishings, and leisure activities. Thus a three-stage *a priori* model would be con-

⁴As this statement implies, humanistic inquiry in marketing research usually would be applied to *social* units, *social* processes, or *social* products in which human beings would serve as the primary data source. This type of humanistic inquiry is termed *particular humanism* (Hirschman 1985). For marketing inquiry for which no human informants are available or desirable, the researcher may use the more egocentric approach of *conceptual humanism*. For a discussion of these two approaches to humanistic inquiry, see Hirschman (1985) or Hirschman and Holbrook (1986).

⁵The analogy of the humanistic conception of a phenomenon as a mass is based on metaphysical beliefs that events are emergent, acausal, and gestaltic.

ceived and the researcher would try to operationalize and measure the several causes and effects composing the model.

A humanist researcher investigating the same consumer subculture would work very differently. Because the goal is to understand the phenomenon in its own terms, the humanistic researcher would view the subculture as an amalgam of its members' values, actions, beliefs, motives, traditions, possessions, and aspirations. The researcher is primarily interested in learning the group's construction of reality and, for a marketing research study, how possessions, purchasing, apparel, automobiles, and leisure time activities *fit into* that reality. As Geertz (1983b, p. 22) states,

Interpretive explanation trains its attention on what institutions, actions, images, utterances, events, customs, all the usual objects of social-scientific interest, mean to those whose institutions, actions, customs, and so on they are. As a result, it issues not in laws like Boyle's, or forces like Volta's, or mechanisms like Darwin's, but in constructions like Burckhard's, Weber's, or Freud's: systematic unpackings of the conceptual world in which condottiere, Calvinists, or paranoids live.

The positivist and humanist research conceptual schemas are depicted in Figure 1.

Step 2. Exploratory investigation. The second step in both positivist and humanist inquiry is to undertake ex-

ploratory investigations of the targeted phenomenon. However, because of the profound contrasts in the respective metaphysics, different methods are used. Exploratory efforts in positivist science usually are aimed at either generating and/or clarifying explicit variable relationships or refining instrumentation and/or operationalization. Because of the linear schema of discrete elements in the mind of the positivist investigator which guides his or her research, the notion of exploration is construed as an opportunity to pretest the theory and refine the quantification techniques.

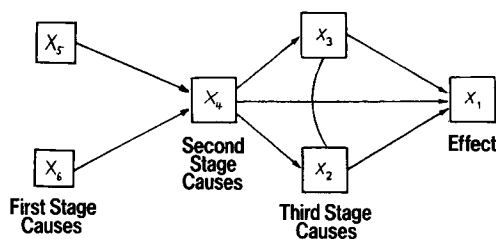
Conversely, the desire for better comprehension of the "textured mass" in the mind of the humanist investigator leads to a different exploratory mode. Typically, the researcher makes several preliminary field visits to observe the phenomenon. These visits are used to explore the phenomenon (as opposed to an implicit model) as it is manifested in various settings. The researcher also uses these preliminary visits to begin discarding preconceptions about the phenomenon; an attempt is made to become receptive to the structuring of reality used by the persons being studied. Field notes are made and documents collected to provide the investigator with a record of ideas and contacts during these early visits.

To conduct exploratory research on a consumer subculture (as in the Step 1 example), the positivist researcher typically would conduct several small-scale studies on selected subsamples of the larger population. Construct operationalizations having desirable properties of reliability and validity, and which seem to provide objective measures of the elements of interest, would be identified and retained for future large-scale application.

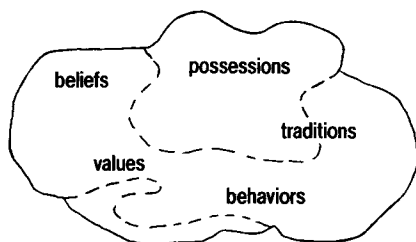
In contrast, the humanist researcher exploring the same subculture would use this stage of the research to observe members in their normal surroundings, perhaps at work, at home, shopping, or engaged in leisure activities. An attempt would be made to identify the various facets composing the lifestyle of the subculture and how those facets are woven together. The researcher might engage in various activities, such as attending a club meeting, participating in a community fair, or attending a religious service.

Step 3. Personal immersion in the phenomenon. During the third stage of the research process, the positivist and humanist methods differ so radically, because of their divergent metaphysics, that unique terminology is needed to describe the humanist approach; traditional positivist labels do not apply. The metaphysic of positivism dictates that during the third stage of research—the conduct of a large-scale survey or a conclusive experiment—every effort be made to keep the researcher's subjective beliefs from interfering with the objective examination of intervariable relationships. Thus, surveys are conducted by interviewers ignorant of the hypotheses of the study, experimental treatments are administered on a double-blind basis, and so forth. Faith is placed in random assignment and manipulation checks to reveal the true nature of reality.

Figure 1
A PRIORI CONCEPTUALIZATION IN POSITIVIST AND HUMANIST SCIENCE



Positivist Schema of Phenomenon



Humanist Schema of Phenomenon

Because the humanist approach denies the possibility of discovering objective truth, the researcher must place faith instead in his or her own sensitivity and empathic insightfulness when exposed to the thoughts, beliefs, values, and realities constructed by others. This process requires the systematic personal immersion of the researcher in the phenomenon being studied. During this immersion process, the investigator participates in and observes the activities under study as unobtrusively as possible. The researcher makes every effort to keep his or her presence nondisruptive, recognizing simultaneously that some impact on the phenomenon's natural functioning is inevitable. If the researcher believes that disruption due to his or her presence has occurred, the suspected nature and extent of this disruption are recorded.

During the period of investigator immersion (which may range from a few weeks to several years), the researcher undergoes a continual observation → hypothesis formation → observation → hypothesis revision process. Hypotheses about the meanings and structures emanating from the phenomenon are formed in the investigator's mind, exposed to additional observations, revised or discarded, and so forth. During this process two factors are critical. First, the researcher must keep the self open and receptive as the investigative instrument. Tendencies toward premature closure of the conceptual schema and solidifying of early hypotheses so they are impervious to later, disconfirming evidence should be avoided. Second, the researcher should keep in mind that the task of the inquiry is to understand the phenomenon fully and completely and *not* to prove or disprove a specific theory. The investigator is present to learn the world view of the participants and not to impose his or her world view on them.

Though this process may seem virtually impossible given the human tendency to fit new data into a pre-existing conceptual structure, it can be mastered with continued practice.⁶ The human observer—despite all of his or her intrinsic biases and preconceptions—has the mental capacity to expand, enlarge, and reconceive a view of reality. Hence, the hermeneutic⁷ circle need not turn inward upon itself, trapped in a cycle of reinforcement. Rather, it can spiral outward, expanding the validity of

comprehension as more and more personal experience is acquired.

The most effective way for a humanist investigator to increase the accuracy of his or her interpretations is through the *practice* of interpreting. Much like the process by which a novice pianist learns to master the instrument through early simple drills, followed by intermediate renditions of standard works, and ultimately interpretive playing of difficult pieces and even composing, the participant observer masters the investigative instrument—the self—by conditioned exposure to phenomena of interest. Empathic vision at first restricted by cultural dogma and ethnocentrism will gradually give way to a more refined capacity to see life through the others' eyes and to translate the obtained vision back to one's own constituency (Hirschman and Holbrook 1986).

Throughout the immersion process, the humanist researcher maintains two diaries or logs. One is a *theory-construction diary* that documents in detail the thoughts, premises, hypotheses, and revisions of thinking developed by the researcher (Lincoln and Guba 1985). The theory-construction diary is vital to humanist inquiry because it shows the process by which the researcher has come to understand the phenomenon. Because meaning within the humanist metaphysic is viewed as having *emergent* and *interactive* qualities, the investigator's diary generally reflects shifts, iterations, digressions, and transversals in the construction of theory. Theory construction in humanist inquiry does not follow the straight-line, deductive path of positivist science. Instead, it is more analogous to the opening of a flower or the peeling of an onion—each layer of observed meaning is valuable; some layers are deeper and more central than others.

The second set of notes maintained by the humanist researcher is a *methodological log* (Lincoln and Guba 1985). In it are kept detailed and time-sequenced notes on the investigative techniques used during the inquiry, with special attention to biases or distortions a given technique may have introduced. The investigative techniques almost always include participant observation and may be supplemented by audiotape recordings,⁸ videotape recordings, artifacts (e.g., shopping lists, garbage), and supplemental documentation (e.g., magazine articles, health records, survey data, census reports).

In constructing the meaning of the phenomenon, the

⁶As in positivist science, humanist inquiry recognizes that every study will fall short of the ideal. At best, one can only hope to improve performance over time, never to perfect it.

⁷In describing the way in which an interpretation is constructed, Geertz (1983b) alludes to the process of intellectually "tacking" between the researcher's own personal knowledge base (with all of its attendant biases, ethnocentricities, and idiosyncracies) and the world view of the people being investigated. Simultaneously, the researcher also must move between the minute detail of close observation and the holistic gestalt of comprehension. Thus, there must be "a continuous dialectical tacking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure in such a way as to bring them into simultaneous view" (Geertz 1983b, p. 69). Geertz (1983b) provides several detailed examples of this process.

⁸Though ethnographers have made frequent use of audio and video recordings to document various societies, marketing researchers desiring to implement the humanist method should be wary of these techniques. In the author's experience, they can be very obtrusive, tending to call undue attention to the presence of the researcher and to cause persons being recorded to act self-consciously. An ethical dilemma also is posed if the recording is done in secret so as to be unobtrusive: Is the subject's privacy being mechanically "invaded"? How does one guarantee informed consent in a field setting? Ethical questions such as these are relevant to humanistic methods and are addressed more fully in a subsequent section.

researcher should attempt to triangulate these data sources as much as possible (Lincoln and Guba 1985). To the extent that field notes, taped interviews, artifacts, and documentary evidence support the same conclusion, interpretations can be constructed more accurately.

To provide some pragmatic grounding for this step and to continue the consumer subculture example, let us assume that a humanist researcher is interested in interpreting the consumption values and lifestyle of WASP (white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant) consumers. Because this consumer group is so large and geographically dispersed, the researcher may decide to narrow the scope of the study to a few key sites of "old-line WASP" communities along the eastern seaboard.⁹ Field trips to such locales as Richmond, Virginia, Charleston, South Carolina, Wilton, Connecticut and Kennebunkport, Maine would be undertaken, each requiring two to three weeks of researcher time. Observations would be made in residential neighborhoods, shopping areas, and other places. If the researcher has personal contacts in the community, he or she might live in a local household with established residents, observing and participating in their daily rounds, attending church services and community meetings, engaging in shopping activities, and meeting and talking with other residents.

In the case of a relatively accessible consumer subculture such as WASPs, the researcher also might attempt to become an active participant rather than just an observer by actually joining some relevant organizations or by attending Protestant church services or community meetings on a regular, long-term basis. Such active involvement is likely to provide richer insights into the values and traditions of the subculture.

Step 4. Constructing an interpretation. The fourth step in humanist inquiry is the construction of an *interpretation* (Hirschman and Holbrook 1986) or *thick description* (Geertz 1973). The interpretation usually is presented in a case study format (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Peshkin 1985). The researcher presents background information on the purposes of the inquiry, a rationale for selecting specific sites and/or times to investigate the phenomenon, and then his or her interpretation of the phenomenon. The interpretation should reflect the construal of reality manifest within the phenomenon and not the perspective of the researcher. In this sense, it is an *emic* description (cf. Cohen 1978). Other than these guidelines, there is no rigid rule for presenting one's interpretation. The content and presentation of each case study will be determined by the unique nature of the phenomenon studied, the unique characteristics of the in-

vestigator, the purposes of the inquiry, and a variety of extraneous factors; in essence, humanist inquiry entails no right ending, only a right process.

This fourth and final stage of the humanist research process brings us back to the original conceptualization of the phenomenon in the mind of the researcher. Recall that in the positivist approach the researcher begins with a mental schema of multiple variables interconnected in a linear network. This schema is rooted in the positivist metaphysic which envisages a concrete, empirical reality composed of interconnected, causally related, discrete elements. Because every stage of the positivist research method is guided by this metaphysic, this type of inquiry culminates in a comparison of the collected empirical data points with the *a priori* mental schema. Ideally, in positivist research, the mental schema's structure is adjusted to conform with the observed "true" structure of the empirical data—allowing, of course, for measurement error.

In the humanist approach, the *a priori* mental schema is a large, amorphous mass whose texture and nature are to be discerned through direct personal experience. At the final stage of the research process, the humanist researcher has had direct contact with the phenomenon under study, has experienced it, and now must attempt to translate that experience into a verbal interpretation. In the authors's own attempts at conducting humanist inquiry, the verbal interpretation often has been preceded by a conceptual breakthrough or gestalt in which the researcher literally "cracks the code" of the phenomenon. The disconnected bits of experience absorbed by the researcher abruptly seem to coalesce into a comprehensive whole. As Geertz (1983b) has described this experience, it is as though the researcher has suddenly grasped a proverb, caught an allusion, or understood a poem. The constituent pieces are clues, but the answer lies in the whole.

Again, let us use the WASP consumer subculture example. The author spent approximately 18 months engaged in field visits, participating in organizations, and observing WASP consumers at work, at play, eating dinner, attending church, discussing politics, and shopping in department stores and supermarkets. The bits of knowledge gained seemed to float in a jumble, until rather suddenly a pattern emerged. The pattern formed around the central values that WASP consumers had expressed verbally to the author in several contexts and that other documentary evidence (e.g., DAR literature, religious ideology) had suggested were basic to their world view. Suddenly (it seemed), the author grasped that these same core values (e.g., practicality, conservatism, individual responsibility, self-control) were expressed in virtually all aspects of the consumers' lifestyle—from clothing preferences to automobiles to leisure activities. Once this value "code" was comprehended, its manifestation throughout every area of consumption could be discerned and the *nature* of the subculture became evident. In Jungian terms, one experienced something akin to

⁹This decision illustrates one of the central *limitations* of humanist inquiry. Because the researcher must personally visit sites and participate in the subculture's activities, he or she is limited to conducting a few case studies over an extended time period. This generalization holds even if a *team* of researchers is involved in the investigation. Each member must still personally visit the various field sites, make notes, and arrive at an interpretation.

grasping the "collective unconscious" of this consumer group. As Geertz (1983b, p. 62), describing the extreme social formality of Balinese culture, explains,

It is *dramatis personae*, not actors, that endure; indeed, it is *dramatis personae*, not actors, that in the proper sense really exist. Physically men come and go, mere incidents in a happenstance history, of no genuine importance even to themselves. But the masks they wear, the stage they occupy, the parts they play, and, most important, the spectacle they mount remain, and comprise not the facade but the substance of things

Some criteria for evaluating whether or not the humanist researcher has represented appropriately the nature of the phenomenon he or she set out to interpret are discussed next.

Humanist Criteria

Within positivist science the predominant criteria for evaluating a research report include assessment of *internal* and *external validity*, *reliability*, and *objectivity* (Calder, Phillips, and Tybout 1983; Campbell 1979; Lynch 1983). As Morgan (1983a) has noted, however, these criteria derive from the specific metaphysic underlying positivist science; consequently, they are inappropriate criteria for evaluating research generated by means of the humanist metaphysic.

The idea of obtaining a generalized form of objective knowledge based on the positivist ideal of systematic, comparative, replicative observation and measurement is often used as a point of reference against which *all* research should be judged. These are the criteria that are often used to disparage the worth of a single case study or of qualitative research, in which the researcher as participant in the situation is really the only research instrument used. Such an approach to evaluation is based on a major fallacy and logical error in that rules for conducting research are mistakenly seen as rules of justification to be used in the evaluation of knowledge. The protocol and aims of positivist research . . . have no logical claim to serve as general standards for the evaluation of knowledge. . . . Hence, research strategies that abandon the positivist viewpoint of the detached, neutral observer cannot be fairly judged in terms of the evaluative criteria normally applied to positivist research, for they seek a different kind of insight, adopt different methodologies, and favor different criteria for judging their knowledge claims (Morgan 1983d, p. 395-6).

The set of criteria appropriate to humanistic inquiry are *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability*. These four concepts have an evaluative role in humanistic science analogous to that of the concepts of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity in positivist science (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Let us examine the operation of each.

Credibility. When the metaphysical basis of positivist science is rejected, the traditional criterion of internal validity is rendered inoperative. There is no longer the assumption of one true world composed of discrete causal

processes, but rather the possibility of multiple constructed realities. Thus there is no concrete benchmark for validating one's interpretation, either in principle or by technical adjustment using the falsification principle (Lincoln and Guba 1985). "In order to demonstrate truth value, the [humanist researcher] must show that she/he has represented those multiple realities adequately . . . that the reconstructions that have been arrived at via the inquiry are credible to the constructors of the original multiple realities" (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p. 296).

To determine the credibility of a particular interpretation, one useful approach is for the researcher to submit the interpretation to the scrutiny of those individuals upon whom it is based, and seek their responses as to its authenticity. This proposal often strikes positivist researchers as problematic on two accounts. First, it may seem inappropriate to consult with the subjects of one's research as to the meaning and correctness of the findings. In positivist science, the researcher occupies an intellectually elevated position in relation to the subjects of study and is deemed more competent (indeed, uniquely qualified) to render judgments about the truth or validity of scientific knowledge. In humanist inquiry, however, the researcher is not viewed as being superior to the subjects and, instead, must *become educated to their* world view. Hence, the persons most capable of evaluating the competence and completeness with which that world view has been interpreted are those who originated it.

A second problematic feature of the humanist credibility criterion from the positivist point of view is that persons who are the subjects of research may misrepresent their "true" feelings, beliefs, motives, and so forth to make themselves appear more attractive, normal, socially proper, or the like. To give these persons access to the study's findings and to ask for their inputs and guidance in constructing the interpretation would seem to be asking for a distorted, flattering self-portrait.

There is no easy response to this criticism. Most of us in marketing—and indeed in other branches of social science—have been taught to be distrustful of taking subjects' statements at face value. We have been taught that people may be deceitful, incompetent, or unwilling to respond to our direct probes. Therefore, they must be provided with elaborate cover stories, kept off balance by distractor cues, administered manipulation checks, and deceived in other ways to enable the positivist researcher to get at the "truth."

The humanist researcher has an alternative theory of people and, therefore, views them differently than does the positivist scientist. To the humanist, people really are as they appear to be. Humanists believe that if people are approached with the sincere intent of genuinely understanding them (as opposed to the intent of manipulating and testing them) they will extend to the researcher as much honesty and openness as is possible between two or more human beings. If there is some intimate deceit that an individual cannot share with another person, it will never be known to the humanist re-

searcher. If there is some group deceit which an entire consumer subculture shares and which they will guard against the intrusion of any outsider, it will never be known to the humanist researcher.

In the study of the WASP consumer subculture, drafts of the interpretation were provided to subculture members for their comments and criticisms. The researcher was prepared to receive a variety of hostile responses ranging from "this is a completely distorted and malicious representation" to "I am so disappointed, I don't ever want to talk to you again about anything." To the researcher's (pleasant) surprise, the majority of comments received agreed with the substance of the interpretation, and even those that were critical were given in the spirit of constructive guidance (e.g., "You are off the mark somewhat on *individuality* as a central WASP value; what is closer to the way we feel would be *individual responsibility*." These comments were incorporated into the final draft. A subsample of WASP consumers to whom it was circulated all agreed that they were "comfortable" with it; several stated that they "enjoyed" it.

Does this outcome mean that the research interpretation was fully credible or that it should be accepted by other researchers without question? In an absolute sense, the answer of course must be no, because no single interpretation of a complex social phenomenon can be complete or satisfactory in communicating the essence of the phenomenon. As Peshkin (1985, p. 278) states, "The failure to exploit fully other themes than the one chosen may be seen as a shortcoming, but [it is] a reality of social research in complex settings. Such settings support many stories . . . not all of which can be told—or told most effectively—by any one researcher."

No quantitative score can be assigned to a humanistic interpretation; there is no coefficient of validity to attach to the research report. Rather there is only the success or failure to gain the confidence of one's subjects and peers. Ultimately, as in all scientific endeavors, one is either believed or not believed; assigning a number will not make the research "better."

Transferability. The second criterion of humanistic inquiry is transferability; it is analogous to the function of assessing external validity in positivist science (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Within the humanistic inquiry method one is concerned not with the *generalizability* of a particular finding (across populations, time, or conditions), but rather with the transferability of one manifestation of a phenomenon to a second manifestation of the phenomenon, recognizing implicitly that no two social contexts are ever identical. To assess the transferability of an interpretation one must know not only the specifics of the context in which the interpretation was generated, but also the specifics of the context to which the interpretation is to be applied. However, to comprehend the specifics of the second context, one first must construct an interpretation of it. *Hence, the only way the transferability of a particular interpretation can be as-*

sessed is by comparing it with interpretations constructed in other contexts. The transferability of an interpretation to a second setting is thus knowable only on a *post hoc* basis; it cannot be assessed prior to the construction of the comparative interpretation.

It must be recognized, however, that humanist researchers, like positivists, carry within themselves some implicit assumptions about the durability of a phenomenon across time and contexts. If one conducts a field visit in a New England WASP consumer community and then changes venue to a Virginia or South Carolina WASP consumer community, one expects to find some constancy and similarity in how people in each community conduct their lives. There is a tendency, perhaps innate or learned, for the researcher to search for sources of continuity in his or her experiences across field sites. However, this tendency must be tempered with a sensitivity to differences, both subtle and significant, that differentiate the communities. Are some subcultural values given higher or lower priority? Are they expressed through consumption preferences somewhat differently? Such variations across contexts should be noted and incorporated into the final interpretation. For example, New England WASP consumers tended to place higher priority on individual responsibility and industriousness, whereas WASP consumers observed in the Southeast tended to emphasize self-control and the maintenance of traditions. The variation in the surrounding cultural contexts (e.g., urban versus rural and industrial versus agrarian) may have contributed to these differences, but in any case they should be noted and acknowledged.

Dependability. A third criterion central to humanistic inquiry is dependability; in function it is roughly analogous to the notion of reliability in positivist science. The traditional assessment of reliability examines the temporal stability and internal consistency of measurements taken on a variable (Lincoln and Guba 1985) and special attention is given to developing research *instruments* that exhibit stability and consistency. In humanistic methodology, however, the "instruments" whose internal consistency and temporal stability are being assessed are not paper-and-pencil scales, but *human beings*—the researchers themselves. How does one evaluate the consistency of the human instrument? How does one know the researcher is rendering a dependable construction of the phenomenon being recorded?

One solution is to use multiple human instruments, just as one might use a split-halves design or multiple indicators to assess scale reliability in traditional positivist methodology. The use of multiple human investigators enhances the dependability of humanistic inquiry. Further, just as in the positivist approach we would not anticipate perfect correlation between multiple indicators or split halves of the same scale, so in humanistic inquiry we do not anticipate perfect correspondence between two researchers' interpretations of the "same" phenomenon. Indeed, in humanistic inquiry it is important to realize that we would *never* expect perfect cor-

respondence among multiple interpretations of the same phenomenon, because each interpretation results from an *interaction* between a unique investigator and the phenomenon of study. Because all human beings differ—even researchers—no two construals of the same phenomenon would be expected to be identical. However, by comparing the interpretations constructed by multiple observers, we can determine which elements are consistent across interpretations and, thus, are more dependable. As Krieger (1968, p. 35–6), has stated,

There should be a way of getting at the force itself by comparing versions and visions—a way of subtracting what each has said that differs from the content of other versions and finding some critical range among the differences. It is an inexact and inconclusive way, though perhaps the only way we have.

It is important to note an additional issue in discussing dependability. Though interpretive elements that are constant over time or consistent across multiple interpretations may be viewed approximately as *replicated findings*¹⁰ in the traditional sense, elements that are unique or idiosyncratic to a particular interpretation are *not* viewed as *false* in the humanistic method. Rather, they are viewed as examples of *intrasubjective* reality, as constructed during the interaction between a particular researcher and the phenomenon. Interpretive consistencies are viewed as examples of *intersubjective* reality, those aspects of a constructed reality that are common across multiple observers. Pragmatically, it is important to recognize that the aspects of one's interpretation that are shared by other researchers are more likely to be accepted by the community of social scientists to which one belongs. As Polanyi (1962, p. 302) has noted, if one's work is to become acceptable to the corpus of social science, it should not be the result of hallucination, delusion, or illusion.

In the case of the WASP consumer subculture study, it would be desirable to examine other humanist inquiries of the same group, for example, Baltzell's (1964) classic *The Protestant Establishment* and Mills' (1956) *The Power Elite*. A comparison of the consistencies and differences among the interpretations rendered in these studies would afford a more dependable understanding of the nature of this subculture than relying only on one researcher's interpretation.

Confirmability. Confirmability in humanistic inquiry is functionally analogous to the notions of neutrality and objectivity in positivist science; however, conceptually it is based on a different set of assumptions (Lincoln and Guba 1985). In humanistic inquiry the researcher is not presumed to be emotionally neutral and personally distant from the phenomenon of interest. On the contrary,

he or she is assumed to be involved intimately with the topic of study and to be immersed personally in interpreting its meaning. Hence, the interpretation generated by the researcher is not assumed to be disinterested or value-free, as in the positivist approach. Rather, it is expected to be *supportable* from the data as gathered by the inquirer, to represent a *logical* set of conclusions given the reasoning he or she employed during the interaction, and to be a *nonprejudiced, nonjudgmental* rendering of the observed reality.

The goal . . . is not the impossible one of eradicating value judgments, but the realistic one of eradicating bias. This is achieved only by recognizing and validating the value judgments on which the activity of the scientist, like all other rational activity, must rest. The only way in which we can strive for "objectivity" in theoretical analysis is to expose the valuations to full light, make them conscious, specific and explicit. . . . (Kaplan 1984, p. 28).

To assess whether or not the interpretation is drawn in a logical and unprejudiced manner from the data gathered and the rationale employed, humanistic inquiry relies on the judgment of an outside auditor or auditors. These individuals should be researchers themselves, familiar with the phenomena under study. Their task is to review the documentation, field notes, methodological diary, and other supportive evidence gathered by the investigator to confirm (or to disconfirm) that the conclusions reached do flow from the information collected.

The evaluations made by the auditors are, of course, judgmental in content and not quantitative. (Similarly, judgments on a method's appropriateness or the supportability of a particular conclusion also are made in traditional positivist science; Runkel and McGrath 1972.) Humanist researchers and auditors alike acknowledge the *constructed* nature of their reality, but they want it to be as open and unbiased a construction as possible.

To fulfill their role properly, the auditors should have several characteristics. First, they should be of approximately the same professional status as the researcher (e.g., full professor, associate professor). Auditors of lower status than the researcher might feel restricted in voicing critical comments, whereas the researcher may feel intimidated by the suggestions of a substantially senior auditor. Second, the auditors should be personally familiar with both the researcher and the phenomenon being investigated. This familiarity ensures that the auditors are aware of the personality traits and value orientations of the researcher and can discern whether and how those factors may have shaped the researcher's interpretation of the phenomenon. Finally, if practicable, the auditors should be drawn from a cross-section of social science backgrounds (e.g., sociology, psychology, anthropology). The varied backgrounds and, hence, fields of reference of the auditors can serve as a further check on the credibility and acceptability of the interpretation.

In initial interpretations of the WASP consumer sub-

¹⁰It is important to note that the dependability criterion in humanistic research would *not* be quantified in a statistical sense. It is a relative assessment of the correspondence between alternative interpretations.

culture, the author had included several value judgments and biased perceptions that reflected a personal "vision" of the subculture and were not readily supportable from the materials collected. These biases were brought to the researcher's attention by the five social scientists¹¹ to whom the interpretation was submitted for confirmability. After three iterations of revision and resubmission, the auditors were satisfied that the interpretation rendered was logically consistent with the documentation presented and with their own knowledge of and experience with the subculture.

The use of auditors, of course, cannot protect the scientific enterprise from willful misrepresentation or false documentation by a humanist researcher. However, dishonesty of this sort will be revealed when other researchers have experiences contrary to those reported by the deceitful researcher. Like the deliberate falsification of survey data or experimental results by positivist scientists, such dishonesty eventually will be found out and the fraudulent scientist exposed.

ETHICAL AND OPERATIONAL PROBLEMS IN HUMANISTIC RESEARCH

Certain ethical and operational problems encountered in the conduct of humanist inquiry differ from those typical of positivist research. In the author's experience, the most troubling of the problems is the ethics of observing and participating in activities with the research subjects (cf. Reynolds 1979, Ch. 7). The term "participant observation" used frequently in the humanist literature represents an extensive continuum of activities. At one end of the continuum is distanced observation, in which the researcher merely stands and observes from an unobtrusive vantage point, such as a car or streetcorner. Few ethical problems are encountered because, like any citizen, the researcher has the right to observe others in public places. The information gained from such distanced observation, however, is not often rich or detailed. The researcher is merely a watcher, with no direct contact or interplay with the subjects. The researcher is largely isolated in an experiential sense from the phenomenon.

A more central position on the participant-observation continuum is occupied by activities described by the term "limited role playing." In this mode, the researcher participates in a limited range of activities, usually those easily accessible, with the subjects of interest. For example, the researcher might attend a garage sale or a community picnic, or pose as a potential home buyer to a real estate agent. This approach gives the researcher more direct access to the subjects' lives and beliefs, but it may raise ethical discomfort in some researchers. "Here

I am," one says to oneself, "pretending to be a home buyer when really I am just a spying scientist."

At this point on the continuum ethical issues may arise that have moral and/or legal implications. If the researcher poses even in a limited way as, say, a home buyer or a car salesman to gain first-hand knowledge of consumption patterns, what could be the potentially negative consequences to the researcher and to others? First, the time and energies of others who are legitimately performing their jobs (e.g., as a real estate agent) may be wasted. Second, the researcher may be placing his or her own personal safety in jeopardy (e.g., a prospective customer may not believe that the researcher is only role-playing and may demand completion of the transaction). Third, the role-playing researcher may inadvertently give potential consumers false information which interferes with their intent to make a purchase (as in the case of the researcher/car salesman). Explicit professional guidelines are needed to govern researcher conduct in situations such as these.

At the other end of the participant-observation continuum is the researcher's active and complete participation in the subject population. The researcher, in effect, joins the subject group, lives with it, and contributes to it as an active member. No longer an outsider or a limited role player, the researcher is now a full-time participant. Participation at this level over an extended period of time generally will provide the researcher with a wealth of direct, deep experience. Such contact is substantially more useful in attaining comprehension than participant observation at the other two levels. However, it is also substantially more troubling in moral and ethical terms. No matter how the scientist may attempt to rationalize the investigation as socially beneficial or contributing to the furtherance of knowledge, the fact remains that he or she is becoming involved with people's lives, being confided in as a friend, and being provided intimate information that might not be given knowingly to an outsider.

Even more serious legal and moral issues may be raised by this type of full-fledged participatory involvement on the part of the researcher. A researcher who fully engages in role-playing activities (e.g., stockbroker, real estate agent) for which he or she is not qualified may be subject to charges of fraudulent behavior and misrepresentation. A researcher who engages in illegal or illicit activities (e.g., drug purchases or sale, purchase of stolen property, financial scams)—even though the goal may be to learn more about these types of marketing transactions—may be liable for criminal prosecution. Further, full participation in even "innocuous" groups such as social organizations and religious bodies may prove morally troublesome.

The author experienced this type of ethical dilemma while conducting the WASP consumer subculture study. Field observations of the "distanced observer" type were made unobtrusively at several locations. They were supplemented by a variety of limited role-playing efforts at colleges and preparatory schools, church services, and

¹¹The auditors were all professional social scientists drawn from the fields of sociology, marketing, social psychology, and clinical psychology. All five knew the researcher well and were peers.

community affairs activities. The latter were accompanied by some minor ethical discomfort. However, the researcher also joined two social organizations, the Daughters of the American Revolution and the English-Speaking Union, where she became an actively participating member for several (≈ 18) months. The E-SU experience was not too troublesome in an ethical sense in that its meetings generally consisted of prepared programs that all the members "observed," followed by informal comradery. The DAR experience, however, was somewhat different. The researcher joined a local DAR chapter, participated in all chapter meetings, and even served as a page during the National DAR Convention in Washington, DC. Despite her genuine credentials and contributions to this group, the researcher was troubled by feelings of duplicity due to the use of the personal experiences as evidence in a research study.

There is no right answer to dilemmas of this sort. However, it would probably be extremely useful for marketing researchers, as a group, to adopt some set of guidelines for participant-observation practices. A type of informed consent and/or set of debriefing techniques would be desirable to permit direct experiential access by the researcher, but prohibit misrepresentation that would be harmful to the research subjects and/or jeopardize the legal/moral status of the researcher.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this article is to develop an argument for the utility of humanistic inquiry in marketing research and to describe the metaphysic, methodology, and criteria of such inquiry. It is hoped that the article will stimulate some marketing researchers to apply the humanistic method in their own studies, and ease the way for the presentation of humanistic inquiry in marketing research forums, such as journals and conferences.

Because humanistic inquiry represents a rather radical departure from the traditional positivist approach commonly practiced in marketing research—and is premised upon an essentially dialectical metaphysic—the article may be viewed by some readers as likely to initiate an ideological dispute between positivists and humanists as to the "right" way to conduct marketing research. Such a construal of intent would be incorrect. As Morgan (1983c) has noted, "The ontological uncertainties discussed . . . suggest the need for *conscious pluralism* in research practice, designed to realize as many different knowledges as possible [italics added]. For what is to be gained by limiting our perspective?"

This article is intended to encourage greater understanding and acceptance of humanistic methods among marketing researchers. It is not meant to advocate that every marketing researcher should do humanist research; rather it is meant to suggest that one should do research consistent with one's personal beliefs about the nature of reality and that the research should be done *well*.

With the increasing normative acceptance of the humanist metaphysic among marketing scholars, research-

ers are confronted for perhaps the first time with the opportunity of choosing an approach to their inquiry. It is hoped that the article provides some initial guidance to those who choose to pursue the humanistic method. However, there is no intention to question or criticize those who choose to pursue positivism. Humanists—all researchers—are obligated to remain always aware that no one approach or paradigm is the "only" approach or paradigm. The humanist way is not the only way; it simply is *a way*.

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