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Research Methods Reader

Methodologies (1)

Doing Qualitative Research

A Practical Handbook

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SAGE Publications
London · Thousand Oaks · New Delhi

2003

Part One THE CONTEXT

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What is Qualitative Research?

In the Sociology Department where I work, we offer a graduate degree in Qualitative Research. This title was chosen to give a flavour of a course largely taught by ethnographers who themselves mainly use qualitative methods. However, I feel that such a title may attract students more in terms of what it promises to avoid rather than by reason of what it offers.

'Qualitative research' seems to promise that we will avoid or downplay statistical techniques and the mechanics of the kinds of quantitative methods used in, say, survey research or epidemiology. In fact, this is indeed the case – although we expect students to take a course in survey methods and to be aware of how the issues of validity and reliability so often posed by quantitative researchers are relevant to any kind of research (albeit in varying ways).

The danger in the title, however, is that it seems to assume a fixed preference or pre-defined evaluation of what is 'good' (i.e. qualitative) and 'bad' (i.e. quantitative) research. In fact, the choice between different research methods should depend upon what you are trying to find out.

For instance, if you want to discover how people intend to vote, then a quantitative method, like a social survey, may seem the most appropriate choice. On the other hand, if you are concerned with exploring people's life histories or everyday behaviour, then qualitative methods may be favoured. However, other, less practical questions arise when you choose between 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' methods. The researcher has to bear in mind that these methods are often evaluated differently. This is shown in Table 1.1, which is drawn from the terms used by speakers at a conference on research methods.

Table 1.1 shows how imprecise, evaluative considerations come into play when researchers describe qualitative and quantitative methods. Depending on your point of view, Table 1.1 might suggest that quantitative research is superior because, for example, it is value-free. The implication here is that

TABLE 1.1 Claimed features of qualitative and quantitative methods

Qualitative	Quantitative
Soft	Hard
Flexible	Fixed
Subjective	Objective
Political	Value-free
Case study	Survey
Speculative	Hypothesis testing
Grounded	Abstract

Source: Halfpenny, 1979: 799

quantitative research simply objectively reports reality, whereas qualitative research is influenced by the researcher's political values. Conversely, other people might argue that such value freedom in social science is either undesirable or impossible.

The same sort of argument can arise about 'flexibility'. For some people, this flexibility encourages qualitative researchers to be innovative. For others, flexibility might be criticized as meaning lack of structure. Conversely, being 'fixed' gives such a structure to research but without flexibility.

However, this is by no means a balanced argument. Outside the social science community, there is little doubt that quantitative data rule the roost. Governments favour quantitative research because it mimics the research of its own agencies (Cicourel, 1964: 36). They want quick answers based on 'reliable' variables.

Similarly, many research funding agencies call qualitative researchers 'journalists or soft scientists. Their work is termed unscientific, or only exploratory, or entirely personal and full of bias' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 4).

For the general public, there is a mixture of respect and suspicion of quantitative data ('you can say anything you like with figures'; 'lies, damn lies and statistics'). This is reflected by the media. On the one hand, public opinion polls are treated as newsworthy – particularly immediately before elections. On the other hand, unemployment and inflation statistics are often viewed with suspicion – particularly when they appear to contradict your own experience (statistics which show that inflation has fallen may not be credible if you see prices going up for the goods you buy!).

By the 1990s, in many Western countries, the assumed reliability of quantitative research was beginning to be under significant threat. In Britain, for instance, the ways in which inflation and unemployment were calculated during the Thatcher era were regularly changed. This suggested to some that such indexes might be being 'fixed' in order to cast a favourable light upon these matters. Similarly, the failure of surveys of voting intention in the British general election of 1992 (almost comparable to the similar failure of US polling studies in the 1948 Truman–Dewey presidential race) made the public a little sceptical about such statistics – even though the companies

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involved insisted they were providing only statements of current voting intentions and not predictions of the actual result.

But such concerns may constitute only a 'blip' in the ongoing history of the dominance of quantitative research. Qualitative researchers still largely feel themselves to be second-class citizens whose work typically evokes suspicion, where the 'gold standard' is quantitative research.

However, so far we have been dealing with little more than empty terms, apparently related to whether or not researchers use statistics of some kind. In the next two sections, I address in rather more detail what social scientists mean by quantitative and qualitative research.

VARIETIES OF QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Bryman (1988) has discussed the five main methods of quantitative social science research and these are set out in Table 1.2.

To flesh out the bare bones of Table 1.2, I will use one example based on the quantitative analysis of official statistics. The example relates to data taken from the General Social Survey (GSS) carried out every year by the US National Opinion Research Center (NORC) and discussed by Procter (1993).

Procter shows how you can use these data to calculate the relationship between two or more variables. Sociologists have long been interested in 'social mobility' – the movement between different statuses in society either within one lifetime or between generations. The GSS data can be used to calculate the latter, as Table 1.3 shows.

In Table 1.3, we are shown the relationship between father's and son's occupations. In this case, the father's occupation is the 'independent' variable because it is treated as the possible cause of the son's occupation (the 'dependent' variable).

TABLE 1.2 Methods of quantitative research

Method	Features	Advantages
Social survey	Random samples Measured variables	Representative Tests hypotheses
Experiment	Experimental stimulus 'Control group' not exposed to stimulus	Precise measurement
Official statistics	Analysis of previously collected data	Large datasets
'Structured' observation	Observations recorded on pre-determined 'schedule'	Reliability of observations
Content analysis	Pre-determined categories used to count content of mass media products	Reliability of measures

Source: adapted from Bryman, 1988: 11–12

TABLE 1.3 Respondent's occupation by father's occupation

		Father's occupation	
		Non-manual	Manual
Son's occupation	Non-manual	63.4%	27.4%
	Manual	36.6%	72.6%

Source: adapted from Procter, 1993: 246

Table 1.3 appears to show a strong association (or 'correlation') between father's and son's occupations. For instance, of the group with non-manual fathers, 63.4 per cent were themselves in non-manual jobs. However, among sons with fathers in manual occupations, only 27.4 per cent had obtained non-manual work. Because the sample of over 1000 people was randomly recruited, we can be confident, within specifiable limits, that this correlation is unlikely to be obtained by chance.

However, quantitative researchers are reluctant to move from statements of correlation to causal statements. For instance, both father's and son's occupations may be associated with another variable (say inherited wealth) which lies behind the apparent link between occupations of father and son. Because of such an 'antecedent' variable, we cannot confidently state that father's occupation is a significant *cause* of son's occupation. Indeed, because this antecedent variable causes both of the others to vary together, the association between the occupations of fathers and sons is misleading or 'spurious'.

Along these lines Procter (1993: 248–9) makes the interesting observation that there appears to be a marked correlation between the price of rum in Barbados and the level of Methodist ministers' salaries, i.e. in any given year, both go up or down together. However, we should not jump to the conclusion that this means that rum distillers fund the Methodist Church. As Procter points out, both the price of rum and ministers' salaries may simply be responding to inflationary pressures. Hence the initial correlation is 'spurious'.

While looking at Tables 1.2 and 1.3, you may have been struck by the extent to which quantitative social research uses the same language that you may have been taught in say physics, chemistry or biology. As Bryman notes:

Quantitative research is . . . a genre which uses a special language . . . [similar] to the ways in which scientists talk about how they investigate the natural order – variables, control, measurement, experiment. (1988: 12)

Sometimes, this has led critics to claim that quantitative research ignores the differences between the natural and social world by failing to understand the

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'meanings' that are brought to social life. This charge is often associated with critics who label quantitative research as 'positivistic' (e.g. Filmer et al., 1972).

Unfortunately, 'positivism' is a very slippery and emotive term. Not only is it difficult to define but there are very few quantitative researchers who would accept it (see Marsh, 1982: Ch. 3). Instead, most quantitative researchers would argue that they do not aim to produce a science of laws (like physics) but aim simply to produce a set of cumulative generalizations based on the critical sifting of data, i.e. a 'science' as defined above.

As I argue, at this level, many of the apparent differences between quantitative and qualitative research should disappear – although some qualitative researchers remain insistent that they want nothing to do with even such a limited version of science (see Phillips, 1973). It follows that, when we compare the two kinds of research, the most we should be looking for are different *emphases* between 'schools' who themselves contain many internal differences.

CRITICISMS OF QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative researchers often assume that a dependence on purely quantitative methods may neglect the social and cultural construction of the 'variables' which quantitative research seeks to correlate. As Kirk and Miller (1986) argue, 'attitudes', for instance, do not simply attach to the inside of people's heads and researching them depends on making a whole series of analytical assumptions. They conclude:

The survey researcher who discusses is not wrong to do so. Rather, the researcher is wrong if he or she fails to acknowledge the theoretical basis on which it is meaningful to make measurements of such entities and to do so with survey questions. (1986: 15)

According to its critics, much quantitative research leads to the use of a set of *ad hoc* procedures to define, count and analyse its variables (Blumer, 1956; Cicourel, 1964; Silverman, 1975). On the basis of this critique, qualitative researchers have preferred to describe how, in everyday life, we actually go about defining, counting and analysing. The implication is that quantitative researchers unknowingly use the methods of everyday life, even as they claim scientific objectivity (Cicourel, 1964; Garfinkel, 1967).

Let me try to concretize this critique by means of a single example. More than twenty years ago, two American sociologists, Peter Blau and Richard Schoenherr, conducted a study of several large organizations. The study is interesting for our present purposes because it is explicitly based on a critique of qualitative methods. In these authors' view, too much research in the 1960s had used qualitative methods to describe 'informal' aspects of organization – like how employees perceive their organization and act according to these perceptions rather than according to the organizational 'rulebook'.

Blau and Schoenherr (1971) suggested that the time was ripe to switch the balance and to concentrate on 'formal' organization, like how jobs are officially defined and how many 'levels' exist in the organizational hierarchy. Such features can then be seen as 'variables' and statistical correlations can be produced which are both reliable and valid.

Let us see how such an apparently simple, quantitative logic worked out in practice. Blau and Schoenherr used as their data organizational wallcharts which show hierarchies and job functions. Unfortunately, from their point of view, as a revealing early chapter acknowledges, these wallcharts are often ambiguous and vary in structure from one organization to another. Consequently, it was necessary to discuss their meaning in interviews with 'key informants' in each organization. Using this information, Blau and Schoenherr constructed standardized measures of various aspects of organizational structure such as 'hierarchy' and 'job specificity'. The result of all this was a set of statistical correlations which convincingly show the relationship between the variables that Blau and Schoenherr constructed.

Unfortunately, given the indeterminacy of the data they were working with, the authors engaged in a series of sensible but undoubtedly *ad hoc* decisions in order to standardize the different forms in which people talk about their own organization. For instance, they decided to integrate into one category the two grades of 'clerk' that appear on one organization's wallchart of authority.

This decision was guided by a statistical logic that demanded clearly defined, 'reliable' measures. However, the researchers' decision has an unknown relationship to how participants in the organization concerned actually relate to this wallchart and how or when they invoke it. Indeed, Blau and Schoenherr are prevented from examining such matters by their decision to stay at a purely 'structural' level and to avoid 'informal' behaviour. This means that their own interpretation of the meaning of the statistical correlations so obtained, while no doubt statistically rigorous, is equally *ad hoc*.

What we have here is a nice case of 'the cart leading the horse'. Blau and Schoenherr adopt a purely statistical logic precisely in order to replace common-sense understandings by scientific explanations. However, despite themselves, they inevitably appeal to common-sense knowledge both in defining their 'variables' and in interpreting their correlations. So the quantitative desire to establish 'operational' definitions at an early stage of social research can be an arbitrary process which deflects attention away from the everyday sense-making procedures of people in specific milieux. As a consequence, the 'hard' data on social structures which quantitative researchers claim to provide can turn out to be a mirage (see also Cicourel, 1964).

This brief (non-random!) example should allow you to understand the kind of criticisms that are often directed at purely quantitative research by more qualitative 'types'. Because space is short, Table 1.4 attempts to summarize these criticisms.

It should be noted that Table 1.4 contains simply some complaints made about *some* quantitative research. Moreover, because quantitative researchers

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TABLE 1.4 Some criticisms of quantitative research

- 1 Quantitative research can amount to a 'quick fix', involving little or no contact with people or the 'field'
- 2 Statistical correlations may be based upon 'variables' that, in the context of naturally occurring interaction, are arbitrarily defined
- 3 After-the-fact speculation about the meaning of correlations can involve the very common-sense processes of reasoning that science tries to avoid (see Cicourel, 1964: 14, 21)
- 4 The pursuit of 'measurable' phenomena can mean that unperceived values creep into research by simply taking on board highly problematic and unreliable concepts such as 'delinquency' or 'intelligence'
- 5 While it is important to test hypotheses, a purely statistical logic can make the development of hypotheses a trivial matter and fail to help in generating hypotheses from data (see Glaser and Strauss, 1967)

are rarely 'dopes', many treat such matters seriously and try to overcome them. So, for instance, epidemiologists, who study official statistics about disease, and criminologists are only too aware of the problematic character of what gets recorded as, say, 'cause of death' or a 'criminal offence' (see Hindess, 1973). Equally, good quantitative researchers are only too aware of the problems involved in interpreting statistical correlations in relation to what the variables involved 'mean' to the participants (see Marsh, 1982: Ch. 5).

In the light of this qualification, I conclude this section by observing that an insistence that any research worth its salt should follow a purely quantitative logic would simply rule out the study of many interesting phenomena relating to what people actually do in their day-to-day lives, whether in homes, offices or other public and private places. But, as the next section shows, a balanced view should accept the strengths, as well as the limitations, of quantitative research.

VARIETIES OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative researchers suggest that we should not assume that techniques used in quantitative research are the *only* way of establishing the validity of findings from qualitative or field research. This means that a number of practices which originate from quantitative studies may be *inappropriate* to qualitative research. These include the assumptions that social science research can only be valid if based on experimental data, official statistics or the random sampling of populations and that quantified data are the only valid or generalizable social facts.

Critics of quantitative research argue that these assumptions have a number of defects (see Cicourel, 1964; Denzin, 1970; Schwartz and Jacobs, 1979; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Gubrium, 1988). These critics note that experiments, official statistics and survey data may simply be inappropriate to some of the tasks of social science. For instance, they exclude the observation of behaviour in everyday situations. Hence, while quantification

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may *sometimes* be useful, it can conceal as well as reveal basic social processes.

Consider the problem of counting attitudes in surveys. Do we all have coherent attitudes on any topics which await the researcher's questions? And how do 'attitudes' relate to what we actually do – our practices? Or think of official statistics on cause of death compared with studies of how hospital staff (Sudnow, 1968a), pathologists and statistical clerks (Prior, 1987) attend to deaths (see Chapter 6). Note that this is *not* to argue that such statistics may be biased. Instead, it is to suggest that there are areas of social reality which such statistics cannot measure.

The methods used by qualitative researchers exemplify a common belief that they can provide a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative data. However, just as quantitative researchers would resist the charge that they are all 'positivists' (Marsh, 1982), there is no agreed doctrine underlying all qualitative social research. Instead, there are many 'isms' that appear to lie behind qualitative methods – for example interactionism, feminism, postmodernism and ethnomethodology (see Chapter 6).

In spite of this diversity, qualitative researchers are seen by Hammersley (1992) to share a set of preferences which are set out in Table 1.5.

Unfortunately, as Hammersley himself recognizes, such a simple list is a huge over-generalization. For instance, to take just item 5 in Table 1.5, qualitative research would look a little odd, after a history of over 100 years, if it had no hypotheses to test!

Nonetheless, if we take the list in Table 1.5 as a reasonable approximation of the main features of qualitative research, we can start to see why it can be criticized. As already noted, in a world where numbers talk and people use the term 'hard' science, a failure to test hypotheses, coupled with a rejection of natural science methods, certainly leaves qualitative researchers open to criticism.

Of course, many scientists themselves reject the wilder dreams of positivism, for instance the search for laws based on laboratory experiment as the 'gold standard' of good science. Nonetheless, we are still left with this

TABLE 1.5 The preferences of qualitative researchers

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | A preference for qualitative data – understood simply as the analysis of words and images rather than numbers |
| 2 | A preference for naturally occurring data – observation rather than experiment, unstructured rather than structured interviews |
| 3 | A preference for meanings rather than behaviour – attempting 'to document the world from the point of view of the people studied' (Hammersley, 1992: 165) |
| 4 | A rejection of natural science as a model |
| 5 | A preference for inductive, hypothesis-generating research rather than hypothesis testing (cf. Glaser and Strauss, 1967) |

Source: adapted from Hammersley, 1992: 160–72

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troubling question: why should we *believe* what qualitative researchers tell us? How can they demonstrate that their descriptions are accurate and that their explanations hold water? It is to these questions which I now turn.

CRITICISMS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

In many, quantitatively oriented social science methodology textbooks, qualitative research is often treated as a relatively minor methodology. As such, it is suggested that it should only be contemplated at early or 'exploratory' stages of a study. Viewed from this perspective, qualitative research can be used to familiarize oneself with a setting before the serious sampling and counting begins.

This view is expressed in the following extract from an early text. Note how the authors refer to 'nonquantified data' – implying that quantitative data are the standard form:

The inspection of *nonquantified* data may be particularly helpful if it is done periodically throughout a study rather than postponed to the end of the statistical analysis. Frequently, a single incident noted by a perceptive observer contains the clue to an understanding of a phenomenon. If the social scientist becomes aware of this implication at a moment when he can still add to his material or exploit further the data he has already collected, he may considerably enrich the quality of his conclusions. (Selltitz et al., 1964: 435, my emphasis)

Despite these authors' 'friendly' view of the uses of 'nonquantified' data, they assume that 'statistical analysis' is the bedrock of research. A similar focus is to be found, a quarter of a century later, in another mainly quantitative text:

Field research is essentially a matter of immersing oneself in a naturally occurring ... set of events in order to gain firsthand knowledge of the situation. (Singleton et al., 1988: 11)

Note the emphasis on 'immersion' and its implicit contrast with later, more focused research. This is underlined in the authors' subsequent identification of qualitative or field research with 'exploration' and 'description' (1988: 296) and their approval of the use of field research 'when one knows relatively little about the subject under investigation' (1988: 298–9).

These reservations have some basis given the fact that qualitative research is, by definition, stronger on long descriptive narratives than on statistical tables. The problem that then arises is how such a researcher goes about categorizing the events or activities described.

This is sometimes known as the problem of *reliability*. As Hammersley puts it, reliability

refers to the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions. (1992: 67)

The issue of consistency particularly arises because shortage of space means that many qualitative studies provide readers with little more than brief, persuasive, data extracts. As Bryman notes about the typical observational study:

field notes or extended transcripts are rarely available; these would be very helpful in order to allow the reader to formulate his or her own hunches about the perspective of the people who have been studied. (1988: 77)

Moreover, even when people's activities are tape-recorded and transcribed, the reliability of the interpretation of transcripts may be gravely weakened by a failure to record apparently trivial, but often crucial, pauses and overlaps. For instance, a recent study of medical consultations was concerned to establish whether cancer patients had understood that their condition was fatal. When researchers first listened to tapes of relevant hospital consultations, they sometimes felt that there was no evidence that the patients had picked up their doctors' often guarded statements about their prognosis. However, when the tapes were retranscribed, it was demonstrated that patients used very soft utterances (like 'yes' or, more usually 'mm') to mark that they were taking up this information. Equally, doctors would monitor patients' silences and rephrase their prognosis statements (see Clavarino et al., 1995).

Some qualitative researchers argue that a concern for the reliability of observations arises only within the quantitative research tradition. Because what they call the 'positivist' position sees no difference between the natural and social worlds, reliable measures of social life are only needed by such 'positivists'. Conversely, it is argued, once we treat social reality as always in flux, then it makes no sense to worry about whether our research instruments measure accurately (e.g. Marshall and Rossman, 1989).

Such a position would rule out any systematic research since it implies that we cannot assume any stable properties in the social world. However, if we concede the possible existence of such properties, why shouldn't other work replicate these properties? As Kirk and Miller argue:

Qualitative researchers can no longer afford to beg the issue of reliability. While the forte of field research will always lie in its capability to sort out the validity of propositions, its results will (reasonably) go ignored minus attention to reliability. For reliability to be calculated, it is incumbent on the scientific investigator to document his or her procedure. (1986: 72)

A second criticism of qualitative research relates to how sound are the explanations it offers. This is sometimes known as the problem of 'anecdotalism', revealed in the way in which research reports sometimes appeal to a few, telling 'examples' of some apparent phenomenon, without any attempt to analyse less clear (or even contradictory) data (Silverman, 1989).

This problem is expressed very clearly by Bryman:

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There is a tendency towards an anecdotal approach to the use of data in relation to conclusions or explanations in qualitative research. Brief conversations, snippets from unstructured interviews ... are used to provide evidence of a particular contention. There are grounds for disquiet in that the representativeness or generality of these fragments is rarely addressed. (1988: 77)

This complaint of 'anecdotalism' questions the *validity* of much qualitative research. 'Validity' is another word for truth (see Chapter 13). Sometimes one doubts the validity of an explanation because the researcher has clearly made no attempt to deal with contrary cases. Sometimes, the extended immersion in the 'field', so typical of qualitative research, leads to a certain preciousness about the validity of the researcher's own interpretation of 'their' tribe or organization. Or sometimes, the demand by journal editors for shorter and shorter articles simply means that the researcher is reluctantly led only to use 'telling' examples – something that can happen in much the same way in the natural sciences where, for instance, laboratory assistants have been shown to select 'perfect' slides for their professor's important lecture (see Lynch, 1984).

Despite these common problems, doubts about the reliability and validity of qualitative research have led many quantitative researchers to downplay its value. However, as we have seen, this kind of 'damning by faint praise' has been more than balanced by criticisms of quantitative research offered by many qualitative researchers.

CONCLUSION

The fact that simple quantitative measures are a feature of some good qualitative research shows that the whole 'qualitative/quantitative' dichotomy is open to question. In the context of this book, as I stated in the Preface, I view most such dichotomies or polarities in social science as highly dangerous. At best, they are pedagogic devices for students to obtain a first grip on a difficult field: they help us to learn the jargon. At worst, they are excuses for not thinking, which assemble groups of sociologists into 'armed camps', unwilling to learn from one another.

Ultimately, objectivity should be the common aim of all social science (see Kirk and Miller, 1986: 10–11). As Hammersley argues:

the process of inquiry in science is the same whatever method is used, and the retreat into paradigms effectively stultifies debate and hampers progress. (1992: 182)

This means that, if we wish to establish criteria for distinguishing qualitative research, we will need to understand the similar issues faced by any systematic attempt at description and explanation, whether quantitative or qualitative (see Table 1.6).

Although Table 1.6 was prepared as a set of criteria for the evaluation of *qualitative* research papers, I believe that the criteria I have selected are

TABLE 1.6 Criteria for the evaluation of research

-
- 1 Are the methods of research appropriate to the nature of the question being asked?
 - 2 Is the connection to an existing body of knowledge or theory clear?
 - 3 Are there clear accounts of the criteria used for the selection of cases for study, and of the data collection and analysis?
 - 4 Does the sensitivity of the methods match the needs of the research question?
 - 5 Was the data collection and record-keeping systematic?
 - 6 Is reference made to accepted procedures for analysis?
 - 7 How systematic is the analysis?
 - 8 Is there adequate discussion of how themes, concepts and categories were derived from the data?
 - 9 Is there adequate discussion of the evidence for and against the researcher's arguments?
 - 10 Is a clear distinction made between the data and their interpretation?
-

Source: adapted from criteria agreed and adopted by the British Sociological Association Medical Sociology Group, September 1996

equally appropriate for quantitative studies. This shows that, in principle, there is no reason to prefer any form of data.

I conclude, therefore, with a statement which shows the absurdity of pushing too far the qualitative/quantitative distinction:

We are not faced, then, with a stark choice between words and numbers, or even between precise and imprecise data; but rather with a range from more to less precise data. Furthermore, our decisions about what level of precision is appropriate in relation to any particular claim should depend on the nature of what we are trying to describe, on the likely accuracy of our descriptions, on our purposes, and on the resources available to us; not on ideological commitment to one methodological paradigm or another. (Hammersley, 1992: 163)

SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have made four basic points. First, 'qualitative' research involves a variety of quite different approaches. Second, although some 'quantitative' research can be properly criticized or found insufficient, the same may be said about some 'qualitative' research. Third, in these circumstances it is sensible to make pragmatic choices between research methodologies according to your research problem. Finally, doing 'qualitative' research should offer no protection from the rigorous, critical standards that should be applied to any enterprise concerned to sort 'fact' from 'fancy'.

Further reading

The most useful introductory texts are Alan Bryman's *Quantity and Quality in Social Research* (Unwin Hyman, 1988), Nigel Gilbert's (ed.), *Researching Social Life* (Sage, 1993) and Clive Seale's (ed.), *Researching Society and Culture* (Sage, 1998). More advanced qualitative analysis is offered by Silverman's *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction* (Sage, 1993), Miles and Huberman's *Qualitative Data Analysis* (Sage, 1984), Hammersley and Atkinson's *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (Tavistock, 1983) and Denzin and Lincoln's (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Sage, 1994). Sensible statements about the quantitative position are to be found in Marsh (1982) (on survey research) and Hindess (1973) (on official statistics).

In addition to these general texts, readers are urged to familiarize themselves with examples of qualitative and quantitative research. Strong (1979) and Lipset et al. (1962) are good examples of each.

Exercise 1.1

Review any research study with which you are familiar. Then answer the following questions:

- 1 To what extent are its methods of research (qualitative, quantitative or a combination of both) appropriate to the nature of the research question(s) being asked?
- 2 How far does its use of these methods meet the criticisms of both qualitative and quantitative research discussed in this chapter?
- 3 How fully does this study satisfy the criteria for the evaluation of research set out in Table 1.6?
- 4 In your view, how could this study have been improved methodologically and conceptually?

Qualitative Methods in Sports Studies

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2005



Oxford • New York

Encountering the Field

Sports Studies and Qualitative Research

Michael L. Silk, David L. Andrews and Daniel S. Mason

The academic discipline known as “sports studies” has evolved over the last few decades into an eclectic mix of research ideologies and viewpoints that seek to critically investigate the role, effects and position of sport within broader society. Contextualizing sport within networks of political, economic and social linkages, the field of sports studies critically interrogates the sporting empirical and attempts to provide comprehension of the dynamism and complexities of cultural life. Such an approach is one that recognizes the creative and contextual character of human interaction (Hammersley, 1989), a position that centers on research designs suited to studying performative human beings in their lived (physical) cultural domains. As the following chapters will show however, the field has developed a number of (at times, conflicting) viewpoints on the nature of research, the types of research questions that are asked, and the manner through which these questions can be explored. In many instances, these views have been taken from broader, parent disciplines, such as history, cultural studies, cultural geography, management, psychology, and/or sociology, and have been held by scholars in traditional kinesiology/physical education/sports studies programs, or by scholars in parent disciplines who have chosen to focus on sport in their research.

Locating sport – as a cultural form within which the production of knowledge and identities takes place – within the material and institutional contexts that structure everyday life provides the underlying site for the critical interrogation of sporting experiences, forms, meanings, structures, and practices. No longer marginalized as a second-rate field of study within academe, and indeed taking a central role in a symbolically oriented, global, entertainment economy, the study of sport must now be taken seriously. Sport provides the site for critical interrogation through a variety of theories or “lenses,” a space that has been characterized by a broad spectrum of research approaches, interdisciplinarity, flexibility, and, as Samantha King indicates in the second chapter of this volume, a methodological contingency that can allow the researcher to employ the tools suitable for critical interrogation of the particular sporting phenomena under investigation.

Unfortunately, the diversity of interests, ideologies and methodologies between sports studies scholars has led to isolation in the evolution of some of the research that has been conducted in this field (see for example, the discussion of the relationship between sport historians and sociologists in Chapter 3). A result has been the development of a strong body of literature that has been fragmented and lacks the unity of interests found in other social disciplines. Thus, students and/or aspiring scholars may find their initial forays into the realm of research in sports studies a daunting task. In this sense, students and scholars are often faced with determining how to conceptualize and analyze the complexities of the "constant battlefield" (Hall, 1981) of the (sporting) world, while at the same time recognizing that they are participating in this world, and thereby shaping it (Slack, 1996). Further, concerns over deciding what questions to ask and how to go about answering them abound, as do issues concerning methodological approaches that would suit an aspiring scholar's ideas about what questions should be asked and how they should be answered.

Typically, students can start to address these issues by taking courses in research design within their respective institutions, which mostly rely on a number of quality, established texts that discuss qualitative research method and design, such as those written by Denzin and Lincoln (2000a), Berg (2001), Creswell (1994), Burton (2000), Denscombe (1998), Silverman (2000) and Yin (1994), or journals that, relatively recently, have treated qualitative research as a field in its own right (e.g. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *Cultural Studies* ↔ *Critical Methodologies*). However, while these texts are critical in providing a foundation, and indeed for teasing out the complexities of the field, for students who seek to use qualitative research methods in their research, there still exists a knowledge gap between the research strategies learned in these and how they have been specifically applied within the sports studies context. This volume thus provides a modest attempt to fill this gap by bringing together a number of varying research approaches to the critical interrogation of the contextually grounded sporting empirical. Given the breadth of research areas within sports studies, and the varying methods used within each, it would be beyond the scope of any book to provide representative examples of all of the strategies used within sports studies. Instead, we have sought to present a small sample of the ways in which certain methods, designs and approaches can illuminate the investigation of physical human beings in their cultural worlds. The contributors offer an array of qualitative approaches that can be used to shed light on the sporting empirical – this volume thus provides a space for the connections between various research strategies, methods, paradigms, histories and communities of those involved in contextual sports studies. In doing so, we hope to provide a supplementary text for courses exploring qualitative research methods and designs that allows students to get a closer look at how some of the varying approaches have been employed in research being done in the field, written by those who have had first-hand experience with a given approach.

The emergence and utility of qualitative research were not universally embraced by scholars attuned to the rigor and mechanics of positivism. Denzin and Lincoln's (2000b) genealogy of qualitative research outlines seven moments that have impacted upon the critical analysis of human beings in their contexts. Such a genealogy is, as Denzin and Lincoln (2000b) suggest, socially constructed and quasi-historical; these moments overlap and simultaneously operate within the present. Nonetheless, these moments provide an excellent sketch of the emergence of qualitative research and the nuances, contradictions and increasing sophistication of the field, and provide the underpinning for consideration of a contemporary contextual sports studies. While we cannot do justice to the history of qualitative research, or indeed the genealogy provided by Denzin and Lincoln (1994; 2000a; 2000b), it is important to briefly summarize these moments for they build toward a "conceptual framework" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b: 2) for qualitative research within the field of sports studies. This historical field consists of the traditional, the modernist, blurred genres, the crises of representation, the postmodern, post-experimental inquiry and the future. The traditional period, not surprisingly given its specific socio-historical location, was characterized by often misguided attempts to objectively analyze "other" or "exotic" human beings in colonized settings. The modernist phase was dominated by the collection of qualitative data which researchers attempted to fit to the canons of positivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; 2000b). The blurred or interpretive genres phase drew upon a range of often competing theoretical narratives (e.g. symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, neo-Marxism, feminism, racial and ethnic theories) that brought into question the "golden age" of social science (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b). Following from the blurred genres phase, the crisis of representation began to address questions of race, gender and class, making writing more reflexive and rupturing foundational concepts such as validity, reliability and objectivity. The "crisis" referred to the researcher's authority and ability to write the experience of the "other" (and indeed the separation of the researcher/other) and the recognition that this experience is created in the text "written" by the researcher (Richardson, 2000a). Postmodern influences have produced new expressions of qualitative data such as fictional ethnographies, ethnographic poetry, self narratives, performance pieces and multi-media texts (Denzin, 1997; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b). The sixth moment asks that the social sciences and the humanities become sites for critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalization, freedom and community (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b), while the "future," according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000b: 3) is the current temporality "concerned with moral discourse and the development of sacred textualities."

The Promise of a Contextual Sports Studies: Paradigms, Potentialities and Pitfalls

Denzin and Lincoln's (1994; 1998; 2000a; 2000b) moments are not necessarily directional, or a purview for *the way* contemporary qualitative research ought to be carried out. Rather, as we indicated above, qualitative research is characterized by all of these overlapping "moments" simultaneously operating in the present (Atkinson et al., 1999; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b) and pointing towards an increasing sensitivity to the promises of qualitative research within sports studies. A contextual sports studies that places sport within the material contexts of everyday life can become an important site for critical conversations about cultural politics and multiracial, economic, and political democracy – conversations that address the imperatives of consumption, the dynamics of the marketplace, commercial space, the sweeping reach of neo-liberal ideology, power and influence, the production of knowledges and identities, nation-states, globalization, freedom and community (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b; Giroux, 2001). Further, qualitative research speaks to the varying roles of contextual sports studies researchers, the civic and political responsibilities assumed through their roles as engaged critics and cultural theorists, forms of intervention, and pedagogical practices that are interdisciplinary, transgressive and oppositional (Giroux, 2001). Thus, qualitative researchers in sports studies can engage in concrete steps that will "change situations" and potentially "bring new value to identities and experiences that are marginalized and stigmatized by the larger culture. They will demonstrate how particular commodities or cultural objects negatively affect the lives of specific people. They indicate how particular texts directly and indirectly misrepresent persons and reproduce prejudice and stereotypes" (Denzin, 2002: 486). This is a contextual sports studies that can, and should, "take sides" (Denzin, 2002: 487), revealing through multifarious forms of (re)representation the shifting oppressive structures of global and local capitalism and how the (sporting) media reproduce gender, racial, sexual orientation, and social class stereotypes and even contribute to consumer practices that are harmful to personal health and the environment (Denzin, 2002). In so doing, this is a contextual sports studies that engages in social critique and moral dialogue, identifying the different relations of cultural capital that operate in specific cultural contexts, offers programs and recommendations for change, and holds the researcher accountable for the moral and personal consequences of any particular instance of advocacy (Denzin, 2002).

Given the potential of qualitative research for a contextual sports studies, the chapters in this volume offer a variety of strategies, methods of inquiry and expressions of "data." These contributions reflect a variety of perspectives and suggest that qualitative research in sports studies is shaped, refined and recreated by diversity, controversies and continuities from the past (Atkinson et al., 1999). These rich and turbulent histories provide the (ever changing) parameters for what is currently considered qualitative research. Given that a definition

of qualitative research is essentializing and thus grounded within a particular historical conjecture it is somewhat problematic to “define” what is meant by the term. Recognizing that qualitative research will mean different things in the future, as it did in the past, Denzin and Lincoln (2000b: 3) offer the following account:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

This definition of qualitative research is clearly guided by paradigmatic assumptions, values and beliefs that work against (or alongside, or even, at times, within) positivist and post-positivist models (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a). Indeed, the paradigms that structure qualitative research work within relativist ontologies (multiple constructed realities), interpretive epistemologies (where the knower and the known interact and shape one another) and interpretive, naturalistic (in nature) methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; 2000).

The critical interrogation of the sporting empirical, by its very nature, cannot treat the dynamism and complexities of the physically active human being as a set of static, isolatable, measurable, mechanical, artificial and observable variables (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Hammersley, 1989). Rather, to capture the essence and contexts of the sporting empirical, research needs to recognize the fluid and intricate interactions between people and the socio-historical worlds in which they exist. This recognition speaks to a deeply entrenched, and at times quite bitter, battle within the field of research design – the debate over legitimate, or “valid,” research designs and methodologies – often manifested in a crude paradigmatic positivism versus interpretivism.

Of course, methodologies are commensurate with particular paradigmatic stances, thus prior to addressing particular methodologies there is a need to understand how they are interwoven with, and emerge from, the nature of particular disciplines and perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). It was the work of Thomas Kuhn (1962) which brought the concept of the paradigm into the popular lexicon of research design. Kuhn (1962) suggested that a paradigm is the entire constellation of beliefs, values and techniques shared by the members of a given scientific community. Of course, paradigms are human constructions, yet nonetheless provide the basic set of beliefs that guides the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a). In essence, Denzin and Lincoln (2000a) propose that a paradigm encompasses axiology (questions of ethics within the social world), ontology (the nature of reality and the nature of the human being in the world), epistemology (how I know the world and the relationship between the knower

and the known) and methodology (the best means for gaining knowledge about the world). The history of research design has been plagued by (an almost redundant) quest by various groups of scientists to “prove” that their way of conducting research is the correct, and thereby only, way to investigate the matter at hand. Technical or physical scientific thought dominated these debates which appropriated a particular dominant approach to studying human beings. This approach, taking place within the positivist paradigm, is based on decontextual, formal and standardized experimentalism that seeks to analytically separate distinct variables in an effort to prove causality – cause and effect. In other words, through formal measurement and conceptualizing the social world as a system of variables, positivism seeks facts or causes of certain phenomena, a truth that can be objectively obtained through the rigorous testing of hypotheses. As such, positivist researchers distance themselves from the particular phenomena under investigation, searching for a reality that is entirely independent of our opinions about certain phenomena. We can term this a positivist ontology – a measurable and objective reality that determines a universal truth. This positivist ontology thus provides the permit for scientists to go about their daily lives, investigating isolated variables in relation to the cornerstones of scientific faith – universal truth, validity, reliability, generalizability. Of course, this perspective lends itself to certain ways of knowledge generation – often termed “epistemology.” As such, a positivist epistemology is centered on controlled data collection, objective distance between the researcher and the subject, quantitative measurement, hypothesis testing and statistical analysis to prove causality.

Given that human behavior is not reducible to fixed patterns, and that it is shaped by, and in turn produces (sporting) cultures, positivist science is not well suited to capturing the myriad perspectives of those in the social world, the contextual character of human interaction (Hammersley, 1989) and thereby the network of political, economic and social linkages that produce, and give meaning to, the sporting empirical. Such a position does not reject outright, the important contributions of positivist science to the understanding of our life worlds; however, it does reject the position that for so long dominated the study of human beings, that positivism was the only way to critically interrogate human beings (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Harding, 1986; Maguire, 1991) – a position that dominated, and perhaps to some degree still does, “sports studies,” kinesiology and physical education departments throughout the world.

The recognition of the limitations or pitfalls of positivism frames the rich, and often troubled, history of the emergence of qualitative designs and methods that aim to recognize the central importance of human action and meaning in the construction of the social world (Hollands, 1985). Challenges to the positivist hegemony began to emerge around the beginning of the twentieth century, and centered on a different set of ontological and epistemological

1995). This approach was thus rooted, from the outset, in a doctrine that surpasses: "the notion that the world is a value free, objective, experiential realm that can be reduced to neat rows and columns of numbers ... in a very basic sense, qualitative methodology plays with words instead of numbers. It is an intellectual field in which language is stretched, moulded and turned on itself, but where numbers evoke – not without reason – anal, male forms of power" (Lewis, 1997: 86). In this sense, rather than suggesting that "reality" or truth will be the same for everyone (positivist ontology), the interpretive project is founded upon the premise that the social world is complex, that researchers and subjects are fundamentally and subjectively attached to the world, and that people define their own realities. In the quest for knowledge then, the interpretive project – a pursuit in understanding the particular behaviors, meanings and realities of individuals within particular social settings – is distinct from its positivist sibling. As opposed then to strict, laboratory standards, qualitative methodologies centred on observation, texts, conversation, interpretation, narrative, writing, performance, and small-scale and local interaction, tend to dominate – a set of approaches to gathering knowledge of the social world that are more fluid and flexible, and often emerge as the project unfolds.

Lincoln & Guba (2000) suggest that the paradigms that provide the structure for qualitative research take as their primary field of interest subjective and intersubjective social knowledge and recognize that the active construction and co-creation of such knowledge by human agents is produced by human consciousness. As opposed to positivism and post-positivism, the metaphysics of the constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology, a subjectivist epistemology and a naturalistic set of methodological procedures – the orientation is thus to the production of reconstructed understandings of the social world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a). In a sense, this epistemological approach towards the social world can be characterized as hermeneutic in that to offer an understanding of a particular action requires an emphasis upon grasping the situation in which human actions make or acquire meaning (Schwandt, 2000). Indeed, a contextual sports studies, in many ways, draws upon the hermeneutic circle that suggests to understand the part (the specific) there needs to be comprehension of the whole (context, beliefs, desires of the text, practices, forms of life, language, beliefs and so on) (Schwandt, 2000). In essence, the hermeneutic circle thus requires a "continuous dialectical tacking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure in such a way to bring both into view simultaneously... Hopping back and forth between the whole conceived through the parts that actualize it and the parts conceived through the whole which motivates them, we seek to turn them, by a sort of intellectual perpetual motion, into explications of one another" (Geertz in Schwandt, 2000: 93). "Data" are thus ground in context, while credibility, transferability, dependability, trustworthiness, conformability and reciprocity replace the usual positivist criteria

of internal and external validity; reliability and objectivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a; Harrison et al., 2001).

Existing alongside the constructivist paradigm is the participatory paradigm. The participatory paradigm suggests a participative, co-created, subjective-objective reality (ontology), an experiential, propositional, practical epistemology producing co-created findings, and a practical methodology centered on political participation in collaborative action inquiry and a language that is grounded within a shared experiential context (Heron & Reason, 1997; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Participatory research is characterized by researchers entering into interactive relations with research participants in some or all phases of the research. Clearly eschewing many of the last vestiges of positivism, the co-participation and co-construction of knowledge can take place throughout the research process, including: collectively deciding on relevant research questions, determining appropriate data collection methods, collaboratively analyzing the results, and communicating the findings (Frisby et al., 2005; Greenwood et al., 1993; Reid, 2000; Ristock & Pennell, 1996). The participatory paradigm is a relatively new approach in qualitative inquiry generally, and has only recently begun to make an impact within sports studies. In particular, it is in the pioneering work of Wendy Frisby and colleagues (Frisby et al., 1997; Frisby et al., 2005), who have utilized participatory forms of research to ensure relevance (to the community under investigation), trustworthiness of the data, and that research projects in sport are conceptualized and conducted with the aim of improving the human condition.

Existing alongside these paradigms are a series of perspectives – each with its own criteria, assumptions and methodological practices – which are not as well unified or solidified as the paradigms (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a). Privileging a materialist–realist ontology centered on a recognition that the real world makes a material difference in terms of race and gender, feminist, ethnic, Marxist, cultural studies and queer theory models (all of which are multiple projects) proffer a subjective epistemology and naturalistic (often ethnographic) methodologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a). Under the influence of post-structural and postmodern sensibilities, the social text is itself problematized given the inability to fully represent the world of lived experiences; as such, works that emphasize reflexivity, that are multivocal, that are ground in the experiences of oppressed peoples and that focus on emancipation are produced (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a).

Doing Contextual Sports Studies

Despite important differences among paradigms and a recent conceptual blurring (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a; Fine et al., 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 2000) between paradigms, the qualitative researcher cannot afford to be naïve to the axiological, ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions of each. As research becomes increasingly interdisciplinary, and given the recognition that all

as Guba (2000) suggest, the various paradigms are beginning to interbreed – such that two theorists previously thought to be in irreconcilable conflict may now appear, under a different theoretical rubric, to be informing one another's arguments. As such, it is time to shift the argument away from how different paradigms structure our efforts to "do" qualitative inquiry and which "label" best suits us. Instead, and as Schwandt (2000: 204) proposes, we should focus on the choices about how each of us wants to live the life of a social inquirer in terms of practical and moral knowledge – "how should I be towards these people I am studying?" This question of course raises a number of issues in respect to our differential quests, and indeed the underpinning reasons of our efforts, to critically interrogate the physically active, and socio-historically contextualized, human being. These issues therefore form the balance of this chapter, and indeed, the other chapters in this book.

In the spirit of Denzin and Lincoln's (2000c) call to "get on with it," and in an effort not to get caught in "prescribing" a "right way" to investigate the sporting empirical – every researcher will develop their own axiological, ontological and epistemological stances – we would like to devote some space to consideration of what a qualitative approach to sport might look like. Again, it is important to reiterate that we are not proposing to provide the "correct" or "only" way to address the sporting empirical; rather, the individual researcher will approach the social world with their own political, moral, ethical, ontological and epistemological positions that will inform the particular methodological strategies to be deployed. However, and in an attempt to aid us in recognizing the potential influence of our investigations and, of course, the (re)presentations of such investigations – whether written, performed, poetic, visual, auditory or involving a combination of these or some other forms – we draw on the work of Michelle Fine and colleagues (2001), who provide tentative "guidelines" for the qualitative researcher. These guidelines are useful across, between and beyond approaches to the sporting empirical and offer a lucid starting point for the critical interrogation of the sporting world. Fine and her colleagues propose a set of questions that each researcher may well ask of themselves as they conduct qualitative research. No matter the specific methodological approaches deployed as part of the armory of the qualitative researcher as bricoleur – an interdisciplinary jack of all trades (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b; Kincheloe, 2001; Lincoln, 2001) – the following list perhaps provides an idea of the life worlds, and indeed challenges, facing the qualitative researcher. Such a list, far from exclusive, and operating across paradigmatic (or not) boundaries, provides a useful point of departure for the qualitative researcher:

1. Have I connected the voices and stories of individuals back to the set of historic, structural and economic relations in which they are situated? (Is the sporting empirical addressed in context?)

2. Have I deployed multiple methods so that very different kinds of analysis have been constructed?
3. Have I described the mundane (as opposed to the unique or startling)?
4. Have some informants/constituencies/participants reviewed the material with me and interpreted, dissented, challenged my interpretations? And then how do I report these disagreements in perspective?
5. How far do I want to go with respect to theorizing the words of informants?
6. Have I considered how these data could be used for progressive, conservative, repressive social policies?
7. Where have I backed into the passive voice and decoupled my responsibility for my interpretations?
8. Who am I afraid will see these analyses? Who is rendered vulnerable/responsible or exposed by these analyses?
9. What dreams am I having about the material presented? (What issues am I pulling from my own biography and what emphasis have I given these?)
10. To what extent has my analysis offered an alternative to the common-sense or dominant discourse? What challenges might very different audiences pose to the analysis presented?

(Adapted from Fine et al., 2000: 126–7)

Clearly, such a list not only frames qualitative inquiry, but embodies a set of self-reflexive points of critical consciousness around how to “represent responsibility” (Fine et al., 2000: 108) and thereby transform public consciousness and common sense about the sporting empirical. Qualitative inquiry into the sporting empirical then is more than methodology alone; it is bound with a set of questions to do with oppression, marginalization, subordination, politics, the economy, crisis, morality, the status quo, the personal, the public and the private – it is a civic, participatory, collaborative project ensconced in moral dialogue (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000c).

In locating, or articulating, sport as an element of the cultural terrain within a wider cultural politics, qualitative inquiry of the sporting empirical can begin to understand sport as a site through which various discourses are mobilized in regard to the organization and discipline of daily life in the service of particular political agendas (Andrews, 1995; Giroux, 2001; Grossberg, 1992; 1997). Sport, thus becomes a component of a wider ideological critique that critically interrogates a range of sites in which the production of knowledge and identities takes place (Giroux, 2001). In essence then, at a methodological level, whatever the geographies and histories at stake, such an approach to the sporting empirical sets great store on situating (Hebdige, 1988) particular objects for analysis (Frow & Morris, 2000). By this, we mean that to understand the site or object of inquiry (sporting structures, experiences and forms) we need to understand the disparate structures that meet in and flow through sport. To do so, the critical sporting empiricist may not only draw upon, and cross, a number of disciplines

aid in "situating sport. Somewhat modifying Frow and Morris then, the critical sport researcher may well attempt to:

1. Address the local and global economic context of sport
2. Address the aesthetic context – in relation to architecture, advertising and the interrelations between aesthetics and economies
3. Address the political context that addresses the mundane and the politics of physically active bodies in space
4. Address a gendered context – such as the organization of gender relations by a mythologized spatial structure
5. Address the ethnographic context – to get at the particularities of lived experience
6. Address the historical context – in terms of thinking through change and continuities
7. Address a textual context – allowing for consideration of sporting forms, structures and experiences as a textual construct and as a form of popular culture directly interrelated with other cultural forms and with an economy of representations and practices that make up a way of life.

(Adapted from Frow & Morris, 2000: 326–7)

Clearly, there would be very few qualitative inquiries that would be able to complete such an analysis; rather, the majority of cultural analyses accept their partiality and provide accounts that are openly incomplete and partisan and insist on the political dimensions of knowledge (Frow & Morris, 2000). In this way, critical analyses of the sporting empirical often start with the particular, sport, the "scrap of ordinary or banal existence," and then work outwards, upwards, internally, sideways and across to unpack the density of relations and intersecting social domains that inform it (Frow and Morris, 2000: 327).

The nuances of qualitative research are important for considering the type of impact, in respect to the generation of knowledge, which qualitative research designs can bring to our understanding of the sporting empirical. Indeed, as Maguire (1991) suggested, qualitative research provides a bold, imaginative, multidisciplinary view of sports studies that has the potential to tell us about human beings generally, rather than reducing them to variables within a performance-enhancing research agenda. Embracing the interpretive paradigm in sports studies clearly recognizes the complexity of the social world, the role of the researcher within that world and the meanings that people attribute to everyday life. Furthermore, through rejecting the idea that research can be carried out in some autonomous realm that is insulated from the wider society and from the particular biography of the researcher, the qualitative researcher in sports studies focuses on the qualitative values and meanings in the context of a "whole way of life" – a concern about sporting cultures, life-worlds and identities

– and thereby provides an opportunity for the expression of “other” cultures and indeed those from the margins of our own cultures. In essence, a qualitative approach to the critical interrogation of sport can provide the route by which our own sporting cultures can be made strange to us, allowing for new descriptions of the world to be generated which can offer the possibility of improvement of the human condition (Barker, 2000). This opens up the critical interrogation of sport to a plethora of intimate and previously “taboo” topics in the social sciences and sports studies – friendship, love, sexuality, physical violence, rape, body habitus, sexuality, ethnicity, physicality, misogyny, gender politics, (marginal) sub-identities, power, disempowerment, diaspora, exercise disorder behavior (a far from exhaustive list) – providing space for marginalized voices in important steps towards the democratization of (sporting) knowledge (Tedlock, 2000).

Strategies of Sporting Inquiry

We suggested above that the qualitative researcher is likely to be a bricoleur – a handyman or handywoman who makes use of the tools available to complete a task (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This of course can be as problematic as it is exciting for reaching the potentialities of contextual sports studies. Bricoleurs refute the limitations of a single method, the discursive strictures of one disciplinary approach, the historicity of certified modes of knowledge production, and the inseparability of the knower and known (Kincheloe, 2001). However, at the same time, bricolage is critiqued for potential superficiality, a failure to understand the disciplinary fields and knowledge bases from which particular modes of research emanate, and for signifying interdisciplinarity – a daunting concept for a graduate student and tenure track faculty member within the halls of institutionalized disciplinarity (Kincheloe, 2001). Yet, despite these critiques – negotiating the boundaries is never going to be easy – the potential gains and insights from such work can go some way to the development of a “vibrant democratic public culture and society” (Giroux, 2001). The contextual sports studies researcher then is likely to require an expansive and flexible methodological arsenal – not to mention an array of disciplinary knowledge bases. In terms of method, this point has been clearly made by Lawrence Grossberg, who noted:

I believe that one can and should use any and every kind of empirical method, whatever seems useful to the particular project. Use them as rigorously and as suspiciously as you can ... I do not think that ethnography, or any other methodology, has a privileged status ... Nor do I think that any one methodology has a greater claim to being somehow more empirical than another. Use anything, including surveys and statistics, if it seems useful, but consider how they are themselves rearticulated (and their practice changed) by the theoretical and political commitments ... of one's own project. I am in favor of anything that helps you gather more and better information, descriptions, resources, and interpretations. (Wright, 2001, 145)

critical sport researcher may choose from, and across, to locate sport within context – what we would essentially term as a contextual sports studies informed by a critical hermeneutics.¹ We have deliberately steered away from crudely splitting the process of gathering data (engaging the field) from the process of expressing data to an audience given they are highly interrelated, simultaneous and continuous processes (Burgess, 1984). Further, and in line with the latest “moments” addressed in the work of Denzin and Lincoln (2000b), there has been a recent shift towards a concern with various different ways of describing, inscribing and interpreting reality (Denzin, 1994; Richardson, 2000a; 2000b) in qualitative research, a concern that derived from recognition that qualitative written accounts have been the products of asymmetrical power relations. As such, we asked each of our contributors to think about how the particular methodological strategies that they explicate engage with newer forms of (re)presentation, including the multiple voices of those being represented and a rejection of the authoritative, realist and objectivist style of scientific writing (James, Hockey & Dawson, 1997). As such, the purview of the contributions is to provide the reader with a deeper comprehension of the types of questions that can be addressed by various approaches, the types of knowledge gained thus far from engagement with particular methodologies within the realm of sports studies, the nuances and techniques of the particular methodologies and the opportunities to be derived from utilizing the approaches within sports studies that have yet to be addressed, and critical reflection on “exemplar studies,” providing the reader with (often personal) accounts of the actual research experience.

Given the above call to locate, or articulate, sport within the wider cultural context, and in an effort to avoid reducing “complex connections into simple catchwords” (Gottdiener, 2000: 7) we open this anthology with an explication of cultural studies that draws on the nuances of engaging and expressing the sporting empirical. Samantha King’s contribution not only points to the ways in which cultural theorists in sports studies conceptualize, analyze and participate in the varied sites of the sporting empirical but highlights the ways in which “data” is weaved or articulated with political, economic and social contexts. In sum, King’s contribution suggests a way for scholars to attune the sporting empirical to the methodological, epistemological and ontological debates that run throughout this text, yet at the same time negotiate praxis in linking the lived experience of human actors, and cultural texts and representations, with the broader political and economic structures of contemporary societies. This chapter sets the scene as it were for the deployment of qualitative strategies that can unearth and reconstruct the context within which a sporting practice, product or institution becomes understandable (Andrews, 2002).

In their chapter, “The Socio-Historical Process in Sports Studies,” David Wiggins and Daniel Mason speak to the developments in sport history in recent decades – developments that have emerged from a recent self-referential

examination of the discipline. Through epistemological and ontological transformations within the field, Wiggins and Mason point towards the insights that can be gained from a critical, interpretive sport history, distanced from objectivity, that can yield rich knowledges on social change and (dis)continuities with the present. In Chapter 4, "Sporting Ethnography – Philosophy, Methodology and Reflection," Michael Silk discusses the rich and troubled histories of ethnography and proposes that the variety of often contradictory approaches and epistemologies classified under the umbrella term "ethnography" provides an exciting space for the acceptance of competing ontologies and for the production of knowledge of the sporting empirical. Following discussion of the varied ethnographic approaches, Silk highlights how these have been taken up within the field of sports studies, pointing to the utility of ethnography in provision of space for marginalized voices in interrogation of dominant and subordinate power struggles, and in (re)connection of the field to the inexorable questions and tensions between praxis, politics and power. Finally, Silk provides a critical and personal reflection on his own work, a "confessional tale" (Sparkes, 1995) that offers the reader a first-hand account of an ethnographic experience.

Often bound with the multiple tools of the ethnographer, the techniques, philosophies and power relations in the practices of interviewing are worthy of academic consideration in their own right – a contention taken up by John Amis in Chapter 5 "Interviewing for Case Study Research." Amis proposes that to understand the various interpretations of social life requires a position of relativism, a realization underpinned by the logic that talking to people will provide access to the multiple realities, complexities, inconsistencies, contradictions and paradoxes of everyday lives. The chapter provides the reader with a trace of the different types of individual and group interview that have been used within sports studies and an account of the ethics of the research interview, the nuances of, and protocols inherent within, the interview process, and the political decisions made in interpretation, analysis, and expression of interview data. Finally, Amis points towards a number of exemplar studies that provide pointers towards good interviewing practice.

Given sport's embeddedness within the symbolic regimes of late capitalism, Darcy Plymire, in Chapter 6 "Qualitative Methods in Sport-Media Studies," highlights the recent boom in sport-media studies. Although media research has a long and established history, Plymire contends that due to its relatively recent entry into the field of sports studies, those studies centered on the relationships between the sport and the media have tended to be, for the most part, qualitative in nature and heavily influenced by the epistemological turn towards cultural studies within the academic study of sport. This influence has meant that the majority of sport-media studies have focused on (1) observations of production, (2) the text and (3) consumption. Plymire discusses the key researchers in each of these three areas, the epistemological, ontological and methodological approaches to each area and the rhetorical strategies that can be employed in expressing media research and points towards exemplar studies that have employed a

analytical framework.

As highlighted in a number of these chapters, the ways in which qualitative data is analyzed, interpreted and presented, have been the subject of a fundamental debate within the field of qualitative research design. Initially centered around the concern over the author's place in the text and over voice, who speaks, who is excluded, how individuals are given weight and how they are interpreted, debate emerged around the decisions made in, and the style of, qualitative writing (see Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Atkinson, 1992; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Clough, 2001; Denzin, 1989; 1994; James et al., 1997; Sparkes, 1992; 1995; Richardson, 2000a; 2000b). The central concern was the realization that the qualitative account was often written in the language of science and that the researcher was a politically bound conduit for the decoding and recoding of the data. The concern with writing culture, and the emergence of differential styles of data presentation are essentially attempts to break down the misleading distinctions between science and rhetoric (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994). These concerns have heralded a new age for qualitative research, one in which "messy," uncertain, multivoiced texts, cultural criticism and new alternative works have become more common (and in many ways displaced classic forms of representation as the "only" legitimate form) alongside reflexive forms of fieldwork, analysis and intertextual representation (Tedlock, 2000). These expressions of qualitative data are clearly more than just questions of semantics or aesthetics; rather such accounts clearly contribute to our understanding of social life (Denison & Rinehart, 2000; Richardson, 2000a), can create voices for previously silenced groups, and are thus at the center, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000c) and Tedlock (2000), of qualitative practice. The final contributions to this volume speak in different ways to the philosophical and political strategies of expression.

Markula and Denison reveal the transformations in the expression of data in recent years, pointing towards the theoretical, methodological and interpretive convergences inherent in hailing writing as a method of inquiry and praxis. The particular focus for Chapter 7, "Sport and the Personal Narrative," is the insights to be gained from crafting stories from people's experiences, showing how lives are lived and understood as complete wholes from the inside and recognizing the role of the researcher in the reconstruction of the narrative text. From this juncture, Markula and Denison discuss the various steps and procedures in the conduct of storied research, the strategies involved in representation, and provide examples of different storied genres that have appeared within sports studies. Finally, the chapter deals with an oft-raised concern over "experimental" representations, the judgment of multiple, or relaxed, ways of representation.

While the borders between the "institution" and the "street," the (private) "intellectual" and the "public" are becoming increasingly crossed (Giroux, 2001) within a number of parent disciplines that inform sports studies – manifest for example through participatory research, intervention, art, image, film, performance, multiple voicing and stylized representations – there has been little

movement within sports studies away from “scientific writing” as the form of expression (there are of course, a few notable exceptions which surface in a number of chapters within this volume). To remove the last vestiges of objectivity, yet sustain voice, an increasing number of scholars are moving towards performance as a mode of research/presentation (Carlson, 1996; Gergen & Gergen, 2000). In the final chapter in this volume, Heather Sykes, Jennifer Chapman and Anne Swedberg show how intellectual work can be both theoretical and performative in a personal account of the construction of a performance ethnography, based on life history interviews of physical education teachers, titled *Wearing the Secret Out*. Sykes et al. details the ontological, epistemological methodological issues inherent in life history interviewing and the potentialities of a “public pedagogy” and “performative politics” (Giroux, 2001), and offer a detailed account of the creation of a performance ethnography prior to reflecting on a number of important issues that emerged from the project.

Both of these final two chapters straddle a key issue in qualitative research – the intersection of epistemology and the dilemma of practice and politics. While there has been profound and dramatic transformation in the short histories of qualitative research in sports studies, concerns over self-reflexivity need not be barriers to the political and practical orientations of the qualitative researcher in sports studies. The key appears to be an almost contradictory ability to recognize and embody the insights from reflexive and deconstructive critiques of expression, yet maintain a “residual” need for political action, misrepresentation, an historical pervasiveness and theoretical abstraction (Bourdieu, 1977; Quigley, 1997). In this way, writing, performance and as yet unimagined ways of expressing our research are never simply a narrative or a life story; rather they are wider projects that proffer a space for disputing conventional academic borders and expanding the range of cultural sites and locations across which knowledges, values, identities and social practices are produced and disseminated (Giroux, 2001). Such expressions not only embrace the tensions between the scientific and interpretive inquiry, between impersonal and experimental texts, and between realist and experiential analyses – the very struggles that will hopefully allow for the continued discussion of the litany of social, personal and ethical dilemmas and for the expansion of qualitative horizons within sports studies – but speak to the potential for a contextual sports studies to interrogate, critique, oppose and intervene in the most pressing social problems of our time.

Note

1. We acknowledge the existence and utility of an array of methodological approaches available to the sports studies researcher. For example, ground within a psychological approach are projective methods (e.g. laddering and the Zaltman technique)

have been used in sports studies (most notably, the Delphi technique in focus group research – see Fontana & Frey, 2000). However, given that these approaches lie outside the purview of the ontological and epistemological positions forwarded in our conceptualization of a contextual sports studies, and indeed are marginal to the potentialities we envision for the political and transformative agenda of the field, we have chosen not to incorporate such approaches in this text (although, for an excellent account of how focus groups have been rediscovered by postmodern feminist ethnographers given this utility in fostering the free expression of ideas in a collective forum, see Madriz, 2000; Amis, this volume).

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Handbook of Action Research

Participative Inquiry and Practice

edited by

PETER REASON AND HILARY BRADBURY

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SAGE Publications
London • Thousand Oaks • New Delhi

The Practice of Co-operative Inquiry: Research 'with' rather than 'on' People

JOHN HERON AND PETER REASON

Co-operative inquiry is a way of working with other people who have similar concerns and interests to yourself, in order to: (1) understand your world, make sense of your life and develop new and creative ways of looking at things; and (2) learn how to act to change things you may want to change and find out how to do things better.¹ Research is usually thought of as something done by people in universities and research institutes. There is a researcher who has all the ideas, and who then studies other people by observing them, asking them questions, or by designing experiments. The trouble with this kind of way of doing research is that there is often very little connection between the researcher's thinking and the concerns and experiences of the people who are actually involved. People are treated as passive subjects rather than as active agents. We believe that good research is research conducted *with* people rather than *on* people. We believe that ordinary people are quite capable of developing their own ideas and can work together in a co-operative inquiry group to see if these ideas make sense of their world and work in practice.

A second problem with traditional research is that the kind of thinking done by researchers is often theoretical rather than practical. It doesn't help people find how to act to change things in their lives. We believe that the outcome of good research is not just books and academic papers, but is also the creative action of people to address matters that are important to them. Of course, it is concerned too with revisioning our understanding of our world, as well as transforming practice within it.

So in traditional research on people, the roles of researcher and subject are mutually exclusive: the researcher only contributes the thinking that goes into the project, and the subjects only contribute the action to be studied. In co-operative inquiry these exclusive roles are replaced by a co-operative relationship, so that all those involved work together as co-researchers and as co-subjects. Everyone is involved in the design and management of the inquiry; everyone gets into the experience and action that is

being explored; everyone is involved in making sense and drawing conclusions; thus everyone involved can take initiative and exert influence on the process. This, as we have said, is not research on people or about people, but research with people. We summarize the defining features of co-operative inquiry – on which we elaborate as the chapter proceeds – as follows:

- All the active subjects are fully involved as co-researchers in all research decisions – about both content and method – taken in the reflection phases.
- There is intentional interplay between reflection and making sense on the one hand, and experience and action on the other.
- There is explicit attention, through agreed procedures, to the validity of the inquiry and its findings. The primary procedure is to use inquiry cycles, moving several times between reflection and action.
- There is a radical epistemology for a wide-ranging inquiry method that integrates experiential knowing through meeting and encounter, presentational knowing through the use of aesthetic, expressive forms, propositional knowing through words and concepts, and practical knowing-how in the exercise of diverse skills – intrapsychic, interpersonal, political, transpersonal and so on. These forms of knowing are brought to bear upon each other, through the use of inquiry cycles, to enhance their mutual congruence, both within each inquirer and the inquiry group as a whole.
- There are, as well as validity procedures, a range of special skills suited to such all-purpose experiential inquiry. They include fine-tuned discrimination in perceiving, in acting and in remembering both of these; bracketing off and reframing launching concepts; and emotional competence, including the ability to manage effectively anxiety stirred up by the inquiry process.
- The inquiry method can be both informative about, and transformative of, any aspect of the human

condition that is accessible to a transparent body-mind, that is, one that has an open, unbounded awareness.

- Primacy is given to transformative inquiries that involve action, where people change their way of being and doing and relating in their world – in the direction of greater flourishing. This is on the grounds that practical knowing-how consummates the other three forms of knowing – propositional, presentational and experiential – on which it is founded.
- The full range of human capacities and sensibilities is available as an instrument of inquiry.

A co-operative inquiry cycles through four phases of reflection and action. In Phase 1, a group of co-researchers come together to explore an agreed area of human activity. They may be professionals who wish to inquire into a particular area of practice; couples or families who wish to explore new styles of life; people who wish to practise in-depth transformations of being; members of an organization who want to research restructuring it; ill people who want to assess the impact of particular healing practices; and so on. In the first part of Phase 1, they agree on the focus of their inquiry, and develop together a set of questions or propositions they wish to investigate. Then they plan a method for exploring this focal idea in action, through practical experience. Finally, in Phase 1, they devise and agree a set of procedures for gathering and recording data from this experience: diaries, self-assessment rating scales, audio or video recordings, feedback from colleagues or clients, etc.

For example, a group of health visitors in south-west England were invited by one of their colleagues to form an inquiry group to explore the sources of stress in their work (Traylen, 1994). After some resistance to the idea that they could be 'researchers', the group decided to explore the stress that comes from the 'hidden agendas' in their work – the suspicions they had about problems such as depression, child abuse, and drug taking in the families they visit which are unexpressed and unexplored.

In Phase 2 the co-researchers now also become co-subjects: they engage in the actions they have agreed; and observe and record the process and outcomes of their own and each other's action and experience. They may at first simply watch what it is that happens to them so they develop a better understanding of their experience; later they may start trying out new forms of action. In particular, they are careful to notice the subtleties of experience, to hold lightly the conceptual frame from which they started so that they are able to see how practice does and does not conform to their original ideas.

The health visitors first explored among themselves their feelings about their 'hidden agendas' and how they were managing them at that time. They then decided to experiment with confronting them. Through role play, they practised the skills

they thought they would need, and then agreed to try raising their concerns directly with their client families.

Phase 3 is in some ways the touchstone of the inquiry method. It is a stage in which the co-subjects become fully immersed in and engaged with their action and experience. They may develop a degree of openness to what is going on so free of preconceptions that they see it in a new way. They may deepen into the experience so that superficial understandings are elaborated and developed. Or their experience may lead them away from the original ideas into new fields, unpredicted action and creative insights. It is also possible that they may get so involved in what they are doing that they lose the awareness that they are part of an inquiry group: there may be a practical crisis, they may become enthralled, they may simply forget. It is this deep experiential engagement, which informs any practical skills or new understandings which grow out of the inquiry, that makes co-operative inquiry so very different from conventional research.

The health visitors' experience of trying out new ways of working with clients was both terrifying and liberating in ways none of them had expected. On the one hand they felt they were really doing their job; on the other hand they were concerned about the depth of the problems they would uncover and whether they had adequate skills to cope with them. In particular, the woman who had initiated the project was anxious and had disturbing dreams. The group members found they had to keep in good contact with each other to provide support and reassurance as they tried out new behaviours.

In Phase 4, after an agreed period in Phases 2 and 3, the co-researchers re-assemble to share – in both presentational and propositional forms – their practical and experiential data, and to consider their original ideas in the light of it. As a result they may develop or reframe these ideas, or reject them and pose new questions. They may choose, for the next cycle of action, to focus on the same or on different aspects of the overall inquiry. The group may also choose to amend or develop its inquiry procedures – forms of action, ways of gathering data – in the light of experience.

The health visitors came back together and shared their experience, helping each other understand what had taken place and developing their strategies and skills at confronting hidden agendas. After several cycles they reflected on what they had learned and wrote a report which they circulated to their managers and colleagues.

So the cycle between reflection and action is repeated several times. Six to ten cycles may take place over a short workshop, or may extend over a year or more, depending on the kind of questions that are being explored. These cycles ideally balance divergence over several aspects of the inquiry topic, with convergence on specific aspects, so that there

is a refined grasp of both the whole and its parts. Experiential competencies are realized; presentational insights gained; ideas and discoveries tentatively reached in early phases can be checked and developed; skills are acquired and monitored; investigation of one aspect of the inquiry can be related to exploration of other parts; the group itself becomes more cohesive and self-critical, more skilled in its work.

Repeat cycling enhances the validity of the findings. Additional validity procedures are used during the inquiry: some of these counter consensus collusion and manage distress; others monitor authentic collaboration, the balance between reflection and action, and between chaos and order. We discuss these below.

Some Examples of Co-operative Inquiry Groups

Accounts of co-operative inquiry practices can be found in this handbook by Mark Baldwin, Penny Barrett and Marcia Hills (Chapters 26, 27 and 33), as well as in John Heron's account of transpersonal inquiry (Chapter 32). Here we sketch some other examples to show the potential breadth of the approach.

A group of general medical practitioners formed a co-operative inquiry group to develop the theory and practice of holistic medicine (Heron and Reason, 1985; Reason, 1988c). They built a simple model of holistic practice, and experimented with it in practice, exploring a range of intervention skills, power sharing with patients, concern for the spiritual dimensions of doctoring, as well as attention to their own needs as medical practitioners. Each reflection phase took place over a long weekend, after six weeks of holistic practice, the whole inquiry lasting some eight months. The experience of this inquiry contributed to the formation of the British Holistic Medical Association. The study was taken forward when a group of general and complementary medical practitioners worked together in a further inquiry group to explore how they might effectively work in an interdisciplinary fashion (Reason, 1991; Reason et al., 1992).

A group of co-counsellors met to refine, through aware practice together over several weekends, a description of the experiences and practices of the self-directed client (Heron and Reason, 1981). Another group met for five hours once a week to reflect together on effective skills, practised during the week in their daily lives, for handling irrational responses to life-situations arising from past trauma and conditioning (Heron and Reason, 1982).

A group of obese and post-obese women explored their experience together, looking in particular at how they were stereotyped in society, and how it was difficult for them to obtain appropriate attention from

doctors and other medical people (Cox, 1996). We think there is great potential for inquiries in which groups of people with a particular physical or medical condition work together to take charge of how their condition is defined and treated. For example, an inquiry is being initiated with people with diabetes to explore their relationship to the services designed to support them.

Two black social work teachers established inquiry groups of black social work students, practitioners and managers to explore their experience. They looked at relationships between black people at work, particularly the experience of black managers and subordinates working together; and how a creative black culture could be generated (Aymer, in preparation; Bryan, in preparation).

Other groups have formed to explore questions of gender, in particular the experience of women and men at work. One inquiry looked at how black women might learn to thrive, as well as survive in British organizations (Douglas, 1999). A woman management undergraduate student used co-operative inquiry in her course work to explore the experience of young women managers in primarily male organizations (Onyett, 1996), stimulating a continued co-operative inquiry at the University of Bath (McArdle, in preparation). Another inquiry has recently been started to explore questions of masculinity and leadership within the policeforce (Mead, in preparation).

Different Forms of Co-operative Inquiry

Some groups are convened by one or two initiating researchers, familiar with the method, who choose an inquiry topic, invite others who are interested to join, and initiate these co-opted members into the inquiry procedures. Others are bootstrap groups, who learn of the method through the literature, and engage in a peer initiation process.

Some initiating researchers may be internal to the inquiry topic, that is, they are fully engaged with the field of study. As a black woman living and working in UK organizations, Carlis Douglas is clearly fully engaged with the inquiry topic, and in an inquiry by youth workers into how people learn the initiator was herself a youth worker (DeVenney-Tiernan et al., 1994).

In other cases, initiating researchers are external to the particular culture or practice that is the research focus of the group, and so cannot be full co-subjects. There are, however, certain to be important areas of overlapping interest and practice, which enable them, to a greater or lesser degree, to be analogous or partial co-subjects. So the initiating researchers of the holistic medicine inquiry were not doctors, but they were both at the time practitioners in psychotherapy, and became analogous co-subjects, in the action phases, in this form of practice (Heron and

Reason, 1985; Reason, 1988c). The initiators of an inquiry into an organizational culture were not members of the culture, but were academics with a lot of experience in the field, and were partial co-subjects as participant, ethnographic visitors to the culture (Marshall and McLean, 1988).

Many inquiries focus on practice within a given social role. A same role inquiry is one in which co-inquirers all have the same role, such as doctor or health visitor, and are researching aspects of their practice within that role. In a reciprocal role inquiry, the co-inquirers are two or more people who interact intensively within a role of equal status, such as spouse, partner, friend, colleague, and inquire into that interaction. Peer relationships of this kind can readily be turned into ongoing co-operative inquiries, thus entirely closing the gap between research and everyday life.

A counterpartal role inquiry is one in which the co-inquirers include, for example, both doctors and patients, or health visitors and some members of the families they visit, and the inquiry is about the practitioner-client relationship and what it is seeking to achieve. We have not yet heard of any full counterpartal role inquiries (although Marcia Hills was developing a proposal for elders to work with their physicians, and for an example of a consultant surgeon's attempts to turn outpatient consultations into mini-inquiries, see Canter, 1998), but they are extremely promising and are bound to occur sooner or later in the interests of client empowerment and practitioner deprofessionalization.

A mixed role inquiry is one that includes different kinds of practitioner. If they do not work together, then they may explore similarities and difference in their several modalities of practice. If they collaborate, then they may focus on aspects of this, as in the inquiry involving general medical practitioners and various complementary therapists exploring issues of power and conflict involved in their collaboration (Reason, 1991).

A further distinction depends on where the action phase is focused. Inside inquiries are those in which all the action phases occur in the same place within the whole group: they include group interaction inquiries and group-based inquiries. A group interaction inquiry looks at what goes on within the inquiry group: members are studying their individual and collective experience of group process. Thus one of us launched a three-day inquiry into the phenomenon of group energy (Heron, 1996a). A group-based inquiry is rather more varied in its format. All the action phases occur when the whole group is together in the same space, but some phases may involve each person doing their own individual activity side-by-side with everyone else; or there may be paired or small group activities done side-by-side. Other action phases may involve the whole group in a collective activity. A transpersonal inquiry used this sort of combination: of the six action phases, two

involved people doing individual activities side-by-side, and four involved collective activity (Heron, 1988b).

An outside inquiry is about what goes on in group members' working and/or personal lives, or in some special project, outside the group meetings. So the group come together for the reflection phases to share data, make sense of it, revise their thinking and, in the light of all this, plan the next action phase. Group members disperse for each action phase, which is undertaken on an individual basis out there in the world. In the example of the social workers' inquiry reported by Mark Baldwin in Chapter 26, the group members, having agreed on the aspects of their practice they would explore, attended to their experience in everyday work situations, bringing their observations back to the inquiry group for reflection and sensemaking on a regular basis.

Inquiries can be further distinguished by their having open or closed boundaries. Closed boundary inquiries are concerned entirely with what is going on within and between the researchers and do not include, as part of the inquiry, interaction between the researchers and others in the wider world. Open boundary inquiries do include such interaction as part of the *action phases* of the inquiry. The youth worker inquiry into how its members learn had a closed boundary: the inquirers focused exclusively on their own learning processes in sub-groups and the whole group (De Venney-Tiernan et al., 1994). The inquiry into health visitors' practice in working with families had an open boundary (Traylen, 1994), as did the holistic medicine inquiry in which general practitioners were engaged with the practice of holistic medicine with their National Health Service patients (Heron and Reason, 1985; Reason, 1988c).

The main issue for open boundary inquiries is whether to elicit data and feedback from people with whom the inquirers interact in the action phases, but who are not themselves part of the inquiry. If no data is generated, a valuable source of relevant feedback and information is ignored. If the data is generated, but the people by whom it is generated remain outside the inquiry and have no say in how it is explained and used, then a norm of co-operative inquiry is infringed. The radical solution is to include some of them, or their representatives, within the inquiry group. A second is to engage with them in dialogue, creating as it were a series of mini-co-operative inquiries, as occurred to some extent in the teachers' inquiry reported by Marcia Hills in Chapter 33. A third approach is for the co-operative inquiry group to take the initiative to establish one or more 'sibling' groups, as for example the midwives' group, reported by Penny Barrett in Chapter 27, whose experience of establishing a supportive group suggests how useful such a group would be for early mothers.

Some inquiries have an open boundary in the *reflection phases*. In the holistic medicine inquiry we invited visiting luminaries to several reflection

meetings to give a talk to the whole group, to participate in the reflection process and give us feedback on it. These luminaries were invited 'to inject new perspectives, refresh our thinking, contribute to our programme design, and challenge the limitations of our inquiry' (Reason, 1988c: 105).

With external participation, it is possible to avoid several of the implicit dangers of collaborative inquiry. Participants are not assumed to fully resource their own inquiry but are able to draw on knowledges beyond the group. External voices can also present a challenge to the paradigms within which the inquiry/co-researchers are located. (Treleaven, 1994: 156)

Inquiry Cultures

We have found it useful to distinguish between two complementary and interdependent inquiry cultures, the Apollonian and the Dionysian (Heron, 1996a). Any effective inquiry will have some elements of both cultures, even when the emphasis is tilted towards one pole rather than the other. The Apollonian inquiry takes a more rational, linear, systematic, controlling and explicit approach to the process of cycling between reflection and action. Each reflection phase is used to reflect on data from the last action phase, and to apply this thinking in planning the next action phase, with due regard to whether the forthcoming actions of participants will be divergent or dissimilar and convergent or similar. The whole person medicine inquiry is a classic example of this genre (Heron and Reason, 1985; Reason, 1988c).

The Dionysian inquiry takes a more imaginal, expressive, spiralling, diffuse, impromptu and tacit approach to the interplay between making sense and action. In each reflection phase, group members share improvisatory, imaginative ways of making sense of what went on in the last action phase. The implications of this sharing for future action are not worked out by rational pre-planning. They gestate, diffuse out into the domain of action later on with yeast-like effect, and emerge as a creative response to the situation. A Dionysian inquiry is described by John Heron in Chapter 32; and the Dionysian spirit is explored in relation to chaos and complexity by Reason and Goodwin (1999).

A more fundamental cultural distinction, is whether it is *informative* or *transformative*. Will the inquiry be descriptive of some domain of experience, being informative and explanatory about it? Or will it be exploring practice within some domain, being transformative of it? The descriptive and the practical are interdependent in various ways. Holding a descriptive focus means you have to adopt some practice that enables you to do so. Here the information you are seeking to gather about a domain determines what actions you perform within it.

Having a practical focus throws into relief a lot of descriptive data. Here the transformative actions within a domain are your primary intent and the information you generate about their domain will be a secondary offshoot of them.

If the inquiry is mainly descriptive and explanatory, the primary outcomes will be propositions and/or aesthetic presentations about the nature of the domain. Secondary outcomes will be the skills involved in generating the descriptive data. If the inquiry is mainly practical, the primary outcomes will be practical knowing, the skills acquired, plus the situational changes and personal transformations they have brought about. Secondary outcomes will be propositions and/or aesthetic presentations; and the propositions will (1) report these practices and changes, and evaluate them by the principles they presuppose; and (2) give information about the domain where the practices have been applied, information which is a consequence of this application. And of course an inquiry may aim to be both informative and transformative, one before or after the other.

Our view, based both in experience and in philosophical reflection (Heron 1996a, 1996b; Heron and Reason, 1997) is that, if your primary intent is to be practical and transformative within a domain, you will get richer descriptions of the domain than you will if you pursue descriptions directly. Practical knowing consummates the other three forms of knowing and brings them to their fullness.

Ways of Knowing and the Inquiry Process

Among the defining features of co-operative inquiry listed at the outset, we mentioned a radical epistemology involving four different ways of knowing. We also call this an 'extended epistemology' — a theory of how we know, which is extended because it reaches beyond the primarily theoretical, propositional knowledge of academia. *Experiential knowing* is through direct face-to-face encounter with person, place or thing; it is knowing through the immediacy of perceiving, through empathy and resonance. *Presentational knowing* emerges from experiential knowing, and provides the first form of expressing meaning and significance through drawing on expressive forms of imagery through movement, dance, sound, music, drawing, painting, sculpture, poetry, story, drama, and so on. *Propositional knowing* 'about' something, is knowing through ideas and theories, expressed in informative statements. *Practical knowing* is knowing 'how to' do something and is expressed in a skill, knack or competence (Heron, 1992, 1996a).

In co-operative inquiry we say that knowing will be more valid if these four ways of knowing are congruent with each other: if our knowing is grounded in our experience, expressed through our

stories and images, understood through theories which make sense to us, and expressed in worthwhile action in our lives. This was so for the doctors, the health visitors, the women in academia, and others, in their lived inquiry together.

We have found it valuable, in the reflection phases when the co-inquirers are busy with sensemaking, to use the expressive forms of presentational knowing – both verbal and non-verbal symbols and metaphors – as a first step to ground descriptive and explanatory propositional knowing more fully in what has gone in the prior action phase (Reason and Hawkins, 1988).

If the primary focus in co-operative inquiry is on action, on transformative practice that changes our way of being and doing and relating, and our world, then it follows that the primary outcome of an inquiry is just such a transformation, that is, our practical knowing, our transformative skills and the regenerated experiential encounters to which they give rise, together with the transformations of practice in the wider world with which the inquirers interact. The emphasis, with regard to research outcomes, shifts from the traditional emphasis on propositional knowledge and the written word to practical knowledge and the manifest deed.

Inquiry Skills and Validity Procedures

Co-operative inquiry is based on people examining their own experience and action carefully in collaboration with people who share similar concerns and interests. But, you might say, isn't it true that people can fool themselves about their experience? Isn't this why we have professional researchers who can be detached and objective? The answer to this is that certainly people can and do fool themselves, but we find that they can also develop their attention so they can look at themselves – their way of being, their intuitions and imaginings, their beliefs and actions – critically and in this way improve the quality of their claims to fourfold knowing. We call this 'critical subjectivity'; it means that we don't have to throw away our personal, living knowledge in the search for objectivity, but are able to build on it and develop it. We can cultivate a high-quality and valid individual perspective on what there is, in collaboration with others who are doing the same.

We have developed a number of inquiry skills and validity procedures that can be part of a co-operative inquiry and which can help improve the quality of knowing (Heron, 1996a). The skills include:

- *Being present and open.* This skill is about empathy, resonance and attunement, participating in the way of being of other people and the more-than-human world. And it is about being open to the meaning we give to and find in our world by imaging it in sensory and non-sensory ways.
- *Bracketing and reframing.* The skill here is holding in abeyance the classifications and constructs we impose on our perceiving, so that we can be more open to its inherent primary, imaginal meaning. It is also about trying out alternative constructs for their creative capacity to articulate an account of people and a world; we are open to reframing the defining assumptions of any context.
- *Radical practice and congruence.* This skill means being aware, during action, of its bodily form, its strategic form and guiding norms, its purpose or end and underlying values, its motives, its external context and defining beliefs, and of its actual outcomes. It also means being aware of any lack of congruence between these different facets of the action and adjusting them accordingly.
- *Non-attachment and meta-intentionality.* This is the knack of not investing one's identity and emotional security in an action, while remaining fully purposive and committed to it. At the same time it involves having in mind one or more alternative behaviours, and considering their possible relevance and applicability to the total situation.
- *Emotional competence.* This is the ability to identify and manage emotional states in various ways. It includes keeping action free from distortion driven by the unprocessed distress and conditioning of earlier years.

The co-operative inquiry group is itself a container and a discipline within which these skills can be developed (Reason, 1994a, 1999a). These skills can be honed and refined if the inquiry group adopts a range of validity procedures intended to free the various forms of knowing involved in the inquiry process from the distortion of uncritical subjectivity.

- *Research cycling.* It should be already clear that co-operative inquiry involves going through the four phases of inquiry several times, cycling between action and reflection, looking at experience and practice from different angles, developing different ideas, trying different ways of behaving. If the research topic as a whole, and different aspects of it singly and in combination, are taken round several cycles, then experiential and reflective forms of knowing progressively refine each other, through two-way negative and positive feedback.
- *Divergence and convergence.* Research cycling can be convergent, in which case the co-researchers look several times at the same issue, maybe looking each time in more detail; or it can be divergent, as co-researchers decide to look at different issues on successive cycles. Many variations of convergence and divergence are possible in the course of an inquiry. It is up to each group to determine the appropriate balance for their work.

- *Authentic collaboration.* Since intersubjective dialogue is a key component in refining the forms of knowing, it is important that the inquiry group develops an authentic form of collaboration. One aspect of this is that group members internalize and make their own the inquiry method so that an egalitarian relationship is developed with the initiating researchers. The other aspect is that each group member is fully and authentically engaged in each action phase; and in each reflection phase is – over time – as expressive, as heard and as influential in decision-making as every other group member. The inquiry will not be truly co-operative if one or two people dominate the group, or if some voices are left out altogether.
- *Challenging consensus collusion.* This can be done with a simple procedure which authorizes any inquirer at any time to adopt formally the role of devil's advocate in order to question the group as to whether one of several forms of collusion is afoot. These forms include: not noticing, or not mentioning, aspects of experience that show up the limitations of a conceptual model or programme of action; unaware fixation on false assumptions implicit in guiding ideas or action plans; unaware projections distorting the inquiry process; and lack of rigour in inquiry method and in applying validity procedures.
- *Managing distress.* The group adopts some regular method for surfacing and processing repressed distress, which may get unawarably projected out, distorting thought, perception and action within the inquiry. The very process of researching the human condition may stir up anxiety and trigger it into compulsive invasion of the inquiring mind, so that both the process and the outcomes of the inquiry are warped by it. If the co-researchers are really willing to examine their lives and their experience in depth and in detail, it is likely that they will uncover aspects of their life with which they are uncomfortable and at which they have avoided looking. So the group must be willing to address emotional distress openly when it arrives, to allow upset persons the healing time they need, and to identify anxieties within the group which have not yet been expressed. (See in addition the several chapters in this handbook which explore 'first-person' inquiry practices: Bill Torbert in Chapter 23, Gloria Bravette in Chapter 30, Peter Reason and Judi Marshall in Chapter 42, Yoland Wadsworth in Chapter 43 and Judi Marshall in Chapter 44.)
- *Reflection and action.* Since the inquiry process depends on alternating phases of action and reflection, it is important to find an appropriate balance, so that there is neither too much reflection on too little experience, which is armchair theorizing, nor too little reflection on too much experience, which is mere activism. Each inquiry group needs to find its own balance between action

and reflection and, within the reflection phase, between presentational and propositional ways of making sense. The appropriate balance will largely depend on the topic being explored.

- *Chaos and order.* If a group is open, adventurous and innovative, putting all at risk to reach out for the truth beyond fear and collusion, then, once the inquiry is well under way, divergence of thought and expression may descend into confusion, uncertainty, ambiguity, disorder and tension. When this happens, most if not all co-researchers will feel lost to a greater or lesser degree. So a mental set is needed which allows for the interdependence of chaos and order, of nescience and knowing, an attitude which tolerates and undergoes, without premature closure, inquiry phases which are messy. These phases tend, in their own good time, to convert into new levels of order. But since there is no guarantee that they will do so, they are risky and edgy. Tidying them up prematurely out of anxiety leads to pseudo-knowledge. Of course, there can be no guarantee that chaos will occur; certainly one cannot plan it. But the group can be prepared for it, tolerate it, and wait until there is a real sense of creative resolution.

Initiating an Inquiry Group

Many inquiry groups are initiated by one or two people who have enthusiasm for an idea they wish to explore, and who recruit a group by some form of circular letter. For example, the black social workers mentioned earlier invited social work managers, practitioners and students to a day long meeting to discuss mutual interests and to propose the establishment of inquiry groups. Groups of up to twelve persons can work well. A group of fewer than six is too small and lacks variety of experience.

When experienced co-operative inquiry researchers initiate an inquiry there can be no absolute parity of influence between them and their co-opted inquirers. They can move from appropriately strong and primary influence to significant peer consultant influence; and on the way may degenerate into either over-control or under-control. It is a mistake to suppose that there can be a simple parity of influence and to try to achieve it, or to imagine that parity has ever been fully achieved in an inquiry involving from five to eight full research cycles. What undoubtedly can be achieved as the inquiry proceeds is a sufficient degree of inter-dependent collaborative reflection and management, for the research to be genuinely *with* people, and not about them or on them.

The initiating researchers have, from the outset, three closely interdependent and fundamental issues to consider:

- the initiation of group members into the methodology of the inquiry so that they can make it their own;

- the emergence of participative decision-making and authentic collaboration so that the inquiry becomes truly co-operative;
- the creation of a climate in which emotional states can be identified, so that distress and tension aroused by the inquiry can be openly accepted and processed, and joy and delight in it and with each other can be freely expressed.

The first of these is to do with cognitive and methodological empowerment, the second with political empowerment, and the third with emotional and interpersonal empowerment. Initiating researchers need some skills in all these three ways of empowering others (Heron, 1996a).

At the induction meeting, the initiating researchers will be wise to make clear that the three strands are basic to the inquiry process, and to invite only those to whom the three strands appeal to join the project. Then they seek a contract in which everyone who wants to join makes a commitment to bring the strands into being. It is important that this contract is not the result of either rapid conversion or persuasive coercion. It needs to be a fully voluntary and well-informed agreement to realize the values of autonomy, co-operation and wholeness which underlie the three strands. A co-operative inquiry is a community of value, and its value premises are its foundation. If people are excited by and attuned to these premises, they join, otherwise not. Getting clear about all this at the outset makes for good practice later (Reason, 1995, 1997).

It is also really important at the induction meeting that, as far as is possible, people have an opportunity to help define the inquiry topic, the criteria for joining the inquiry, the arrangements for meeting structure and related matters. The following is a possible agenda for such a meeting:

- Welcome and introductions, helping people feel at home.
- Introduction by initiators: the broad topic of inquiry to be considered.
- People discuss what they have heard informally in pairs, followed by questions and discussion, leading to possible modifications of the inquiry topic.
- Introduction to the process of co-operative inquiry, the three strands mentioned above, and whether the proposed inquiry is likely to be Apollonian or Dionysian, and informative or transformative.
- Pairs discussion followed by questions, whole group discussion, with an airing of views on the three strands.
- Clarification of criteria for joining the inquiry group.
- Practical discussion: number of cycles, dates, times, venues, financial and other commitments.
- Self-assessment exercise in pairs. Individuals use the criteria to assess whether they wish to include themselves in the group or not.

We have found that this is a very full agenda for one meeting; it is better to hold a second introductory meeting to ensure understanding and agreement than to rush through all the items.

Groups will devise a programme of meetings arranged so there is sufficient time for cycles of action and reflection. A group wishing to explore activities that are contained within the group, such as meditation skills, may simply meet for a weekend workshop which will include several short cycles of practice and reflection. But a group which involves action in the external world will need to arrange long cycles of action and reflection with sufficient time for practical activity. The holistic doctors group met to reflect for a long weekend after every six weeks of action on the job, the health visitors for an afternoon every three weeks or so. An inquiry into interpersonal skill met for a weekend workshop at the home of two of the participants and then for a long afternoon and evening every month to six weeks, finishing with another residential weekend workshop.

Once the inquiry is under way, it is helpful to agree early on how roles will be distributed. If it makes sense for the initiator also to be group facilitator for the early reflection meetings, this should be made clear. Later on, the group can decide if it wishes to be fully democratic and eventually rotate the facilitator role, or if it would prefer one or two people to facilitate throughout. It may be helpful to identify who has skills in facilitating the methodology strand, the collaboration strand, and the emotional and interpersonal strand, and share out roles appropriately. Inquirers may wish to craft groundrules, particularly to preserve confidences within the group (Reason, 1988b).

It is helpful to decide early on what the primary outcomes of the inquiry are to be. For informative inquiries, then the primary outcomes will be presentational or propositional, or some combination of the two. For transformative inquiries, the primary outcomes are transformations of personal being, of social processes, or of the environment, and the various skills involved. Aesthetic presentations or written reports will be secondary: the primary outcomes may best be shared by demonstrations or portrayals of competent practice, or by training others to acquire and get the feel of such competence.

It is important for co-operative inquirers not to fall foul of the propositional compulsion of academia: the outcome of inquiries do not have to be confined to the traditional written report. They can pioneer aesthetic presentations as informative outcomes, and find action-oriented ways of sharing transformative outcomes.

Regardless of the way in which the presented outcome is provided for others, the group needs to decide who will produce it. Thus if there is to be a written report or article, a decision is required on who will write it and on what basis. Will all members of the group contribute to it, edit it and agree to it before

it is sent out? Or is it acceptable for one or two people to write their own report based on the group experience. While some form of co-operative report is consonant with the inquiry method, we have also found it helpful to adopt the rule that any individuals can write whatever they like about the group, so long as they state clearly who the author is and whether or not other group members have seen, approved, edited or contributed to the text.

Notes

Thanks to Marcia Hills for a careful reading of this chapter.

1 Our individual and separate accounts of co-operative inquiry over the past 27 years can be found in Heron, 1971, 1981a, 1981b, 1982, 1985, 1988a, 1988b, 1992, 1996a, 1996b, 1998; Heron and Reason, 1981, 1982, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1997; Reason, 1976, 1988a, 1988b, 1988c, 1991, 1993, 1994a, 1994b, 1995, 1996, 1998a, 1988b, 1999a, 1999b; Reason and Goodwin, 1999; Reason and Heron, 1995; Reason and Rowan, 1981.

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