

1

THE ANATOMY OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Deconstructing a Sample Question

Paradigm: Postpositivism

Interrogative: What

Substance: Nature of Literacy

Setting: Technology-Rich Fourth-Grade Classroom

Perspective: Sociocultural

Research Tradition: Ethnography

Parse the Anatomy

Chapter Summary

Suggested Activities and Discussions

Worksheet 1.1: Parse the Anatomy

I am a first-semester doctoral student in Business. I have bachelor's and master's degrees in Business. I am interested in brand loyalty.

I am a second-year doctoral student in Sports Psychology. I was a clinical psychologist for several years but want to focus on sports psychology. I am interested in the courage of CEOs.

I am a master's student in Learning Technologies. I want to design educational software, so I am interested in users' experiences with interface screen clutter.

These are typical introductions my students offer on the first night of a graduate seminar entitled, Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods. As graduate students, they bring a rich array of professional experiences as well as advanced coursework in their varied fields (e.g., Business, Sports Psychology, Learning

Technologies). As the instructor of a research methods course, it is my honor to help each student transform their professional interests into actionable research. As I listen, I wonder, how can I help these students formulate significant research questions, identify **research methods** (steps to follow as they collect and analyze data) that answer their questions, and prepare them to collect and analyze data that are **trustworthy** (incorporates strategies that help readers believe the findings of their study as well as discuss the limitations of their design; see Chapter 5: *Critique Trustworthiness*) and publishable? Similarly, whether I am having conversations with colleagues or planning for my next research project, I seek to refine the topic. In my experience, when someone expresses an interest, they have a hunch. They have an intuition that there is something significant to explore. I seek to hone a research question that preserves the kernel of intuition and maintains the zeal that gave birth to the topic of interest.

Challenged by transforming passions into research, over the years, I crafted a heuristic that I return to again and again. I work with students and colleagues to convert brand loyalty, CEO courage, interface clutter, and a full array of other passions from topics of interest to full-fledged studies. The heuristic is based on what I consider to be six fundamental components of qualitative research design. In other words, the heuristic represents a skeletal structure, or Anatomy, of research design. There may be other components and heuristics, nonetheless, I have found these six to be useful.

The purpose of this book is to introduce you to the Anatomy and support you as you translate your passions into a viable research question that incorporates the components of research design. The Anatomy may chafe your current concepts of research questions. I am hopeful, however, that when you use the Anatomy, you will be able to craft research questions that help you conduct corresponding studies efficiently and effectually. This book is a prequel to collecting and analyzing qualitative data. The focus is on formulating a qualitative research question—but not just any qualitative research question. Using the Anatomy, your question will embody the structural components of a well-crafted study. You will be poised to propose and conduct your study that I hope will illuminate your world.

To help you become familiar with the Anatomy, throughout this book, I reference and deconstruct a sample research question. The sample is derived from my dissertation that launched a significant portion of my research agenda through the ensuing decades. In this chapter, I dissect the sample question to reveal and briefly define the six parts of the Anatomy of a Qualitative Research Question. In the ensuing chapters, I revisit the parts of the Anatomy to consider their role in formulating a study and describe strategies you might use to refine and finalize your research question.

The parts can occur in varied sequences, should be used flexibly, and may even be omitted from the final research question. Nonetheless, I submit that researcher(s) should be cognizant of all six parts because they provide footholds for research design. This chapter might be likened to the box top of a jigsaw puzzle: it gives you the big picture. The purpose of Chapter 1 is to become familiar with the Anatomy by deconstructing a sample question and then practicing your familiarity by identifying the components of the Anatomy in seminal studies. In Chapter 2, I consider the role of **paradigms** (worldviews) in research design and challenge you to examine your paradigmatic assumptions. In Chapter 3, we dump the puzzle pieces on the table and start to work the puzzle. Specifically, I describe metacognitive strategies to help you transform your intuition into a robust research question. In Chapter 4, so you can see the Anatomy at work, I describe composite conversations I have with students and colleagues as we discuss topics of interest and formulate research questions. You get to be a fly on the wall and listen in as students/colleagues and I use the Anatomy. Finally, Chapter 5 is dedicated to converting your research question into a research proposal. I ponder the characteristics of innovative vs significant questions, provide a sample proposal template, leverage the Anatomy to formulate your rationale as well as evaluate related literature, revisit whether the parts of the Anatomy are in alignment, describe how to plan for trustworthiness, and finally highlight a few logistical points you might consider as you plan to conduct your study.

DECONSTRUCTING A SAMPLE QUESTION

Let's begin with the sample research question:

*Given a **postpositivist paradigm**¹, **what**² is the **nature of literacy**³ in a **technology-rich fourth-grade classroom**⁴ from a **sociocultural perspective**⁵ using **ethnographic**⁶ research methods?*

The Anatomy of this research question consists of the following six parts:

1. Research paradigm: Postpositivist
2. Interrogative: What
3. Substance or Topic: Nature of literacy
4. Setting: Technology-rich fourth-grade classroom
5. Perspective: Sociocultural
6. Research tradition: Ethnographic Methods

I encourage novice researchers, and those who want to hone their design prowess, to practice by filling out these parts for several seminal studies (see Chapter 1: *Parse the Anatomy*, Suggested Activity #2, [Worksheet 1.1](#)). Consider how these parts are explicitly stated in the purpose of the study, articulated as research questions, and discussed in the manuscript. Again, some parts will appear in the research question while other parts may only appear in the manuscript. When you craft your own research question, I recommend that you fill out all six parts of the Anatomy, so you are aware of your own assumptions and the implications that each part has for your stated research question. Let me go through the sample.

Paradigm: Postpositivism

In Chapter 2, I attempt to explicate the role of paradigms in research design. I refer to research **paradigms** as the coalescence of **ontology** (philosophy of being), **epistemology** (philosophy of the existence of knowledge), **research tradition** (cohesive set of data collection and data analysis methods that purposely address specific types of questions while mitigating threats to trustworthiness), and **report genre** (distinctive literary style) (Hatch, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 2005; see Appendix B). Paradigms encompass your worldview, your understanding of truth and reality. In the sample question, I am transparent with myself and my audience about my view of reality. I state upfront that my ontological and epistemological assumptions are rooted in postpositivism. The remainder of the Anatomy will therefore align with postpositivism. As detailed in Chapter 2, some basic tenets held by **post-positivists** include: reality is complex, systematic analysis can help us grapple with estimations of reality, the researcher and researched cannot be isolated therefore researcher bias must be acknowledged, findings are contextual and therefore the research report will include a rich description of the context to facilitate transferability (see Table 2.1). As a postpositivist, the interrogative, topic, setting, perspective(s), and research tradition will align with these tenets.

Often, research reports, especially journal articles, omit discussions of paradigmatic assumptions. Nonetheless, they exist. This part of the Anatomy, while often unstated, is fundamental to your research question. We ask the questions that we ask, we care about the questions we ask, because of our view of reality. While your research question may not explicitly state your paradigm, I encourage you to identify your assumptions about reality. I like to begin the methodology section of my proposals and reports with a paradigmatic statement that becomes fodder for the

rationale of how I plan to collect and analyze data. Specifically, because the sample question was rooted in postpositivism, I systematically collected and analyzed my role in the setting, became a participant observer who maintained **prolonged engagement** (became part of the culture by being consistently present and involved in substantive activities with the participants; distinct from longitudinal methods in which researchers drop by over extended periods of time) so I could provide a **thick description** (sufficient description of the setting and social norms such that readers can compare to their own settings). Identify your paradigm. It will position you to articulate your question, refine your research design, and ultimately contend for the significance of your work. For additional discussion of paradigms, see Chapter 2.

Interrogative: What

In the sample question, the interrogative is *What*. One way to formulate research questions is to play with the interrogative. Is your study best conducted as a *What* question or a *Who, Where, When, Why, How* question? Interrogatives may appear innocuous. In reality, they shift the entire study including the focus/topic, perspective, related literature, rationale, and methods and may even imply paradigmatic assumptions. In Chapter 3, I will explore these implications in more depth.

Substance: Nature of Literacy

The third part of the Anatomy is the **topic** (substance). Carving out the substance helps you know what related literature to discuss. In this example, I discussed the literature regarding the nature of literacy—not literacy acquisition, not the effectiveness of using technology to support literacy development, nor an entire array of research about the integration of literacy and technology. As a reviewer for journals, I am often reminded that authors wrestle to identify their topic. Maybe a better way of saying this is that authors wrestle with how to narrow down their topic and carve out reports derived from broader studies. Qualitative researchers, in particular, are commonly interested in the complexities of reality. Numerous topics are viable within an area of study. However, for the purpose of design, researchers must carve out, hone in on the substance, topic, at hand. In my experience, this is not as easy as it sounds. Personally, I revise this part of the Anatomy several times while I formulate my overarching research question. For more details, see Chapter 4.

Setting: Technology-Rich Fourth-Grade Classroom

The fourth component of the Anatomy is self-explanatory. Where will this study occur? When you propose a study, the setting may be generic because you have not yet received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and therefore have not broached conversations with gatekeepers or potential participants. Nonetheless, you know the sort of location and participants with which you hope to work. When the sample study was proposed, the setting was identified as a technology-rich elementary classroom. Given IRB approval, I contacted school principals where I knew there were 1:1 technology classrooms. As field entry negotiations proceeded, I refined where the study actually occurred: technology-rich fourth-grade classroom.

Not all qualitative research takes place in a setting. The sample at hand used ethnographic research methods and therefore the setting was a component of the design. However, phenomenologies, for example, focus on the lived experience of a phenomena—regardless of time and place (Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 2019; van Manen, 2014). In such cases, this part of the Anatomy should specify the parameters for selecting participants. A classic phenomenology by Moustakas (1961) asked, what is the lived experience of loneliness? The setting was not a location but an experience with a specified phenomenon, loneliness. Regardless of location or parameters of an experience, specify the setting/parameters.

Perspective: Sociocultural

Perspective (point of view) informs how you see your topic. For example, a dietician, outdoor enthusiast, chef, and parent may differ in their views of high-fat and low-carb foods. A dietician may focus on how to keep you healthy, an outdoor enthusiast may consider the weight of food while packing along the Appalachian Trail, a chef may be interested in new combinations of foods that appeal to clients, while parents may consider how to develop their children's healthy eating habits. An ant, mole, eagle, and I have varied perspectives of my front yard. An ant sees every speck of dirt to select viable options to build an ant hill, a mole values my front yard according to the grubs available, an eagle has a bird's-eye view, while I see the horrible condition of my grass or the depth of leaves that someone, other than me, should rake.

Similarly, theoretical perspectives alter how you view your topic (see Baker, 2010). In the sample question, I chose to view the *nature of literacy* from a *sociocultural perspective*. Two sociocultural tenets informed my view of literacy: (1) literacy changes as culture changes and (2) we live in a

technological culture. These tenets provided the essence of my rationale: if literacy changes as culture changes and our culture is imbued with technology, then someone should examine the nature of literacy in a technological culture. That someone is me! When you craft your rationale, that someone will be you!

Some novice researchers struggle to identify their theoretical perspective(s). All research has theoretical orientations—whether the researcher is aware of them or not. Theoretical perspectives are foundational and not to be ignored for a couple of reasons. First, theoretical perspectives inform how you collect, analyze, and interpret data. A sociolinguist will collect, analyze, and interpret data differently than a cognitivist. A neurologist will collect, analyze, and interpret data differently than a sociologist. Thus, understanding your theoretical perspective can help you hone the focus of your study.

Second, you can purposely bring a new perspective to your field thereby shedding new light. For example, in my field, new light was shed when researchers examined the reading process from a cognitive perspective. Additional insights were provided during ensuing years when research examined reading from psycholinguistic and then sociocultural perspectives. Researchers continue to provide new insights by taking new perspectives toward the field. A new perspective adds dimensions to a field that previously went unnoticed. Take a new or emerging perspective and you may glean insights from your study to which previous research was blinded.

Third, you can advance the theory itself. All studies will focus on a topic and reveal insights about that topic. However, only those interested in that topic will find the research informative. Meanwhile, when your research is explicitly framed in theory, your work will inform all who share or explore your theory. While topics are domain specific, theories traverse across domains. Sociocultural theories may inform research conducted in education, medicine, business, the arts, biology, and more. In other words, while your work may inform those who examine your topic, by explicitly describing your theoretical assumptions, your work can reach across your field and permeate into other fields by extending and honing the theory itself. While you may not focus on the same substance as those in other fields, your work to advance, refine, or refute basic theoretical assumptions can impact all who consider their work from your lens(es).

I use the metaphor of table settings on a tablecloth. The plates, glasses, and silverware are likened to topics of inquiry. When you conduct research on any of these topics, your findings will inform those who also study plates, glasses, or silverware. The tablecloth is likened to the theoretical basis of your study. When you clearly articulate your theoretical perspective(s), your

findings can inform everything that sits on the tablecloth. Theoretical perspectives are foundational. If your study sheds light on theoretical assumptions, then your work may inform those who share your passion for your topic, your field, as well as extend to those beyond your field. To make such impact, you must first articulate the theoretical orientation, perspective, lens, assumptions that you are making when you collect, analyze, and interpret your data.

Because my work commonly lies at the intersection of literacy and technology, I have students interested in understanding varied uses of technology (e.g., social media, virtual realities, artificial intelligence). While these technologies provide interesting fodder for understanding literacy, I propose that the lens the researcher takes toward these technologies has the potential to inform not only the intersection of literacy and technology but also anyone, within and beyond my field, who is informed by the lens I select. Theory extends beyond a topic and a field of inquiry. If your research can clarify, extend, or refute theoretical assumptions, then you are positioned to explicate the significance of your work within and beyond your field of inquiry.

Research Tradition: Ethnography

The sixth and final component of the Anatomy is the research tradition. Some common qualitative traditions are ethnography, phenomenology, case study, narrative inquiry, biography, and grounded theory, among others (see Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2014). If your work can be answered using an established tradition, then the data collection and analysis methods will be straightforward. If your work aligns with an established tradition, you already know what data you need to collect and the methods you can use to analyze them. While qualitative researchers commonly collect and analyze some combination of observation data, interviews, and/or artifacts, each tradition has distinct methods. Ethnographers collect and analyze data that are distinct from phenomenologists or narrative inquirers. While there are many ways to collect and analyze qualitative research data, traditions coalesce these methods to purposely address specific types of questions and purposely address threats to trustworthiness. There is a plethora of insightful books dedicated to expounding the data collection and analysis methods of qualitative research traditions. To dig deeper into the methods used by each tradition, see Chapter 3: *Suggested Readings*.

When I crafted the sample research question, I selected **ethnography** (research tradition designed to study culture). In order to identify and describe the characteristics of literacy in a technological setting, I needed to collect and

analyze data as unobtrusively as possible. I needed to systematically account for my role in the setting. I needed to provide a thick description so the findings might be **transferable** (relatable to other settings). I therefore employed ethnographic research methods that aligned with my paradigmatic assumptions (e.g., reality is expansive, systematic analyses facilitate the ability to make estimations of reality, the researcher and researched cannot be isolated therefore researcher bias must be acknowledged, findings are contextual and therefore not generalizable but may be transferable).

PARSE THE ANATOMY

At the end of most chapters, I provide Suggested Activities that are intended to give you an opportunity to put the chapter's content into practice. When appropriate, I provide corresponding Worksheets. At the end of this chapter, I propose an activity entitled, *Parse the Anatomy* (see Suggested Activity #2 and [Worksheet 1.1](#)). Specifically, I recommend that you identify some seminal qualitative studies, preferably from your field, and identify the six parts of the Anatomy. To support your efforts, I describe a sample version of this activity. While I recommend that you identify seminal studies from your field, for two reasons, I use a sample that resides outside of my field. One, this book already has examples from my field. I want to expose you to the applicability of this book across fields. Two, if you are a new scholar, my foray into other fields may be similar to your attempts to find seminal work within your field. In other words, to emulate the efforts of novice researchers, I describe how I find a seminal study in a field where I am a novice and then describe how I identify the six parts of the Anatomy.

First, I conducted a search for “seminal” and “qualitative.” If you are looking for seminal qualitative studies in your field, you will likely include your field or a specific topic to your search. I found several research reports that highlighted Quint's (1963) research as seminal for nursing. So I found Quint's article and identified the following purpose statement,

Focus in this article is on the viewpoint of the woman who experiences mastectomy, and attention is directed toward it as a turning point in her life. (p. 88)

Later in the article, she states that this was an “investigation of adjustment to mastectomy” (p. 88). Similar to many qualitative reports, Quint makes purpose statements without articulating a research question. When you write your own proposal and the resulting books or articles, you too may prefer to

articulate your work in terms of a purpose statement. Whether a question or purpose statement, the six components of the Anatomy remain pertinent.

Given Quint's purpose, I attempt to rephrase it as a question because this forces me to identify the primary interrogative for the study. I consider varied interrogatives. Does her purpose answer *Who, What, Where, When, Why, or How?* I am fairly confident that her interrogative answers *What*. She appears to ask, *What are the viewpoints of women who experience mastectomy as a turning point (adjustment) in life?* Now that I have her purpose converted to a question, I can parse it according to the six components of the Anatomy.

What are the *viewpoints* of *women who experience mastectomy* as a *turning point (adjustment) in life?*

I turn to [Worksheet 1.1](#) and fill out the components I ascertained thus far:

Study 1, Include reference Quint (1963)					
Paradigm	Interrogative	Substance (Topic)	Setting/Parameters	Theoretical Perspective(s)	Tradition
	What	Lived experience of turning points/adjustments	Women who have experienced a mastectomy		Something that collects and analyzes participants' viewpoints

Filling out [Worksheet 1.1](#) forced me to differentiate between Quint's topic and the setting/parameters. I considered whether Quint's interest was on experiencing mastectomy. I dismissed this possibility because her purpose statement is about understanding a particular experience among those who had a mastectomy; her focus is on turning points/adjustments. Therefore, an inaccurate phrasing would make mastectomy the topic of this study. Instead, mastectomy is the setting/parameter of the experience she studied. As a researcher, if I parse the question inaccurately, I will spend inordinate amounts of time reviewing unrelated literature. For example, if I were Quint and thought my topic was about mastectomy, then I would have dived into mastectomy literature to discuss what is known about mastectomy and how this study contributes to the research corpus. This would result in a plethora of topics unrelated to my actual interest: turning points/adjustments.

Similarly, I was challenged to figure out where Quint's stated focus fit into the Anatomy. When Quint states that her focus is on participants' viewpoints, I wondered if viewpoints was her topic. If so, then she would have tied this work to its significance within "viewpoint" literature. She would have plunged headfirst into research about viewpoints. Given that Quint's article values the viewpoints of women who have experienced a mastectomy and the empty columns on [Worksheet 1.1](#) are paradigm, perspective, and tradition, I considered whether Quint's stated focus fits into another part of the Anatomy. I mulled the role of viewpoints in Quint's study.

As I read Quint's article, it became obvious that viewpoints were her primary data set. Quint interviewed women who had a mastectomy to understand their turning points (adjustments). Her stated focus wasn't her topic but her data set. She collected and analyzed interview data. Not only that, but interview data were her only data set. In other words, this study did not examine cultural norms (e.g., **ethnography**), contextual data with specified parameters (e.g., **case study**), participants' stories related to turning points (e.g., **narrative inquiry**), life story from birth to present (e.g., **biography**), theories that explain the origins of turning points with the possibility of predicting the future of turning points (e.g., **grounded theory**), or collect artifacts as a primary data set (e.g., **content analysis**). When I turn to Chapter 3 and Table 3.1, by process of elimination, the remaining research tradition is phenomenology. According to Table 3.1, **phenomenology** is a research tradition designed to examine a lived experience. Bingo! Quint studied the lived experience of turning points (adjustments) among women who had a mastectomy. I can now fill out the Tradition column of [Worksheet 1.1](#).

Given insights into Quint's interrogative, topic, setting, and research tradition, I can posit her paradigm. As stated, many journals do not ask researchers to discuss their paradigm. In fact, often this gets cut due to space limitations. When you complete [Worksheet 1.1](#), this is the component of the Anatomy that you may have to infer. If you are reading this book as part of a graduate course, professional development, or with a group of scholars, identifying a researcher's paradigm is a great discussion point. Similar to my process for considering Quint's research tradition, I can use a process of elimination to consider her paradigm.

I turn to Chapter 2 and find Table 2.1. I explore the considerations of each paradigm. Do Quint's interrogative, topic, setting, and research tradition align with positivism, postpositivism, constructivism, critical, or post-structural considerations? I can pretty easily rule out positivism because Quint values the participants' viewpoint of their lived experiences. According to

Table 2.1, **positivism** views reality as existent regardless of human experience. Given that Quint's study is based on participants' viewpoint of their own experiences, it is likely that she was not a positivist. I look for other paradigmatic considerations that are misfits with Quint's study. **Critical paradigms** view reality as power. I see no indications that Quint examined turning points (adjustments) according to who was empowered and disempowered. I think I can rule out the critical paradigm. **Poststructural paradigms** question systematized research methods that produce tenets—especially if the tenets define reality, reify current conceptions, or produce binaries. Quint appears to conduct a systematized study in which data are coded and generate themes to represent the participants' realities. I think I can rule out poststructuralism. This leaves me with postpositivism and constructivism.

This is a perfect opportunity for me to highlight a common tendency to link research traditions to paradigms. This is most obvious when we make such statements as, if you collect numbers then you are using quantitative research methods which means you are a positivist. Conversely, we say, if you are not collecting stats, you must be doing a qualitative study because you are not a positivist. There are no direct matches between research traditions and paradigms (see Appendix B). In other words, it is possible to conduct a phenomenology as a postpositivist or a **constructivist** (paradigm that believes reality is ascribed by the human experience to the knower). Phenomenology doesn't fit in one paradigm box or the other. The same is true of ethnography, case study, narrative inquiry, biography, grounded theory, and content analysis, to mention a few. Similar actions (e.g., research methods) can be used by researchers with varied paradigms. However, the reasons for their action(s) will differ (see Chapter 2: *Introduction to Paradigms*).

While I cannot infer Quint's paradigm by her actions (e.g., research tradition), I can see how her stated focus on viewpoints aligns well with constructivism that ascribes reality to the knower. In Quint's study, she wants to understand the participants' realities. She appears to believe that reality exists within the participants. In the absence of Quint's paradigmatic explanations, I am comfortable with viewing this work as constructivistic. I could be wrong. But as I consider the insights gleaned from Quint's seminal work, one reason it appears to be seminal is that it brought constructivistic realities to nursing research.

I am now missing only one part of [Worksheet 1.1](#): theoretical perspective(s). Unfortunately, Quint doesn't identify her theoretical perspective(s). In the 1960s, omission of theories was more common than it is today. Every field and journal is different. If you submit a research report to the best

journals in my field, it will be desk rejected (not even sent to reviewers) if you omit a robust discussion of your theoretical assumptions. As described earlier in the chapter, perspective defines how you see your topic. There are differing views of food (e.g., dietician, outdoor enthusiast, chef, and parent) and my front yard (e.g., ant, mole, eagle, and me) depending on the assumptions made about food and my front yard. Likewise, given interview transcripts, Quint ascertained which comments counted as data and which comments did not count as data. Her theoretical perspective informed these decisions. I return to her article. I attempt to ascertain what theories helped Quint value some comments as representations of turning points (adjustments) but not others. When I sit back and consider the data that Quint chose to report, they include stories of heartrending angst. Her report is not statistical but coalesced around themes of fear of death, uncertain futures, and loss of agency when discussing options with surgeons.

Another strategy I use to ascertain Quint's theoretical perspective is to read through her discussion section. The discussion section highlights the significance of your study. Hopefully, your work will be significant for several reasons. It might extend the current knowledge of your topic, the theories involved, as well as paradigmatic assumptions and research methods. I chose this article because several referred to is as seminal within the field of nursing. Quint's discussion is directed toward nurses. In her discussion, Quint states, participants "have little access to nursing personnel except for brief contacts centered on procedures and physical tasks.... nursing personnel do not openly initiate discussion about mastectomy and its personal meanings is the rule, not the exception" (p. 92). Quint concludes by stating, "For nurses to accept responsibility in this problem, however, they must be willing to forego the practice of saying, 'That's the doctor's responsibility'" (p. 92). The discussion highlights the trauma the participants endured and how nurses do not have the opportunity to discuss the trauma and support women who have gone through a mastectomy. While I lack knowledge of theoretical perspectives invoked in nursing, I can make some broad inferences. In a general sense, it seems to me that Quint relies on theories of self-esteem, fear, and agency in order to collect, analyze, and discuss her data. She is not invoking theories related to chemistry or biology. Rather, she seems to feature the psychology of experiencing trauma and how nurses are needed to support women who undergo mastectomy. Unfortunately, Quint's article omits how her work relates to theories and how it pushes theories and possibly the field of nursing forward. Nonetheless, when I consider broad fields of inquiry (e.g., psychology, chemistry, biology) I can see where her work fits. To complete [Worksheet 1.1](#), I

therefore specify fields of inquiry all the while acknowledging the actual theories remain indistinct.

Study 1, Include reference Quint (1963)					
Paradigm	Interrogative	Substance (Topic)	Setting/ Parameters	Theoretical Perspective(s)	Tradition
Constructivist	What	Lived experience of turning points/ adjustments	Women who have experienced a mastectomy	Derived from psychology	Phenomenology

I completed [Worksheet 1.1](#) with a pretty good estimation of the six components of the Anatomy of a seminal study. I have to admit, while completing this Suggested Activity, I wondered, Why am I doing this? What's the value of this Suggested Activity? I return to the Introduction of this book which states,

The essence of research design resides in your ability to articulate research questions. The research question is the progenitor of the study. A well-crafted question embodies all the design elements for your study thereby providing the skeletal structure of your research design. Ask a well-crafted question and the design will fall into place.

The purpose of this book is to provide a heuristic that researchers can readily invoke to formulate robust, viable research questions that encapsulate the design elements you need to conduct qualitative research. Given a robust research question, in which the researcher can parse the components of the Anatomy, you will save time, energy, and resources. In Quint's example, if she had inaccurately parsed her study by identifying a different interrogative, topic, setting, research tradition, paradigm, or theoretical perspective(s), then her study would have been a different study. Of course, a different study may have been seminal too. But it wouldn't have accomplished her stated focus. It is my hope that the heuristic invoked in this book will help you clarify and articulate your research interests in such a way as to give you the ability to adroitly design and conduct research.

While completing [Worksheet 1.1](#), I also wondered if only proficient qualitative researchers could possibly fill out [Worksheet 1.1](#). After all, I had to skip ahead to Chapter 3, Table 3.1, Chapter 2, and Table 2.1 to complete the Suggested Activity. How can novices possibly know to do this? The

short answer is, they can't. Filling out [Worksheet 1.1](#) may be like reading an unknown foreign language. That's OK. I propose that this activity allows you to get your proverbial feet wet. It gives you the opportunity to know what you do and don't know. You may know more than you think you do. By wrestling to complete [Worksheet 1.1](#) you can personalize this book. You can start to build bridges from the content in this book to your research. It has been argued that learning is spiral instead of linear. In which case, anytime you formulate a new research agenda, you may find it helpful to return to this book and once again clarify your thought to ask viable and robust research questions that target your substantive passions. Discussing [Worksheet 1.1](#) with others may help you ascertain what you know, want to know, and how the Anatomy can inform your work. So, I agree: [Worksheet 1.1](#) may be overwhelming. Give it your best shot and then turn to Chapters 2–5 to develop proficiencies that will put you in good stead to design and conduct qualitative studies as well as provide feedback to qualitative researchers.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In summary, based on decades of designing qualitative research with doctoral students and colleagues, I honed a heuristic that can be used to facilitate the design of qualitative research. This heuristic is based on the Anatomy of a Qualitative Research Question that consists of six components:

1. Paradigm
2. Interrogative
3. Substance (topic)
4. Setting/Parameters
5. Perspective
6. Research tradition

To help you become familiar with each component of the Anatomy, I deconstructed a sample research question. I described how the paradigm, interrogative, topic, setting, theoretical perspective, and research tradition informed the construction of the sample research question. Next, I encouraged you to practice using your newfound knowledge by identifying the parts of the Anatomy in a seminal study. To support your efforts, I modeled how I went about finding each component in a seminal qualitative study.

Now that I have introduced you to the Anatomy, deconstructed a sample question, and identified each component of the Anatomy in a seminal study, I proceed to Chapter 2 and the beginning point of research design: your paradigm.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Write your overarching research question using all six parts of the Anatomy: paradigm, interrogative, substance/topic, setting, perspective, research tradition. In Chapter 3, we will discuss strategies to hone your question.
2. Go to [Worksheet 1.1](#). Identify 3–5 seminal qualitative research studies in your field. Identify the six parts of the Anatomy for each study. Discuss your identification with others. Based on your identification and discussion, revise your research question.

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WORKSHEET 1.1 ■ Parse the Anatomy
 Identify 3–5 seminal qualitative research studies in your field. Identify the six parts of the Anatomy for each study. If you are unable to identify any of the parts, leave it blank. Discuss your identification and blanks with others. Based on your discussion, consider your own research question.

<i>Study 1, Include reference</i>					
Paradigm	Interrogative	Substance (Topic)	Setting/Parameters	Theoretical Perspective(s)	Tradition
<i>Study 2, Include reference</i>					
Paradigm	Interrogative	Substance (Topic)	Setting/Parameters	Theoretical Perspective(s)	Tradition

(Continued)

WORKSHEET 1.1 ■ Parse the Anatomy (Continued)

<i>Study 3, Include reference</i>					
Paradigm	Interrogative	Substance (Topic)	Setting/Parameters	Theoretical Perspectives(s)	Tradition
<i>Study 4, Include reference</i>					
Paradigm	Interrogative	Substance (Topic)	Setting/Parameters	Theoretical Perspectives(s)	Tradition
<i>Study 5, Include reference</i>					
Paradigm	Interrogative	Substance (Topic)	Setting/Parameters	Theoretical Perspectives(s)	Tradition