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## INTRODUCTION

### The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research

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This chapter is guided by the following:

- How to create a new family of terms for a new critical inquiry as terms slip and slide, fall over one another. In other words, what do we mean by critical, Indigenous, decolonizing, and all the posts—postcolonial, postmaterialist, poststructural, postperformative?
- What do all the traditional terms—ethics, action, research, inquiry, critical, feminist, transdisciplinary, intersectionality, critical race, performance, social justice, transformative, dialogic, reflexive, participatory, emancipatory, narrative, resistance, love, loss, praxis, rigor, writing as a way of being in the world, writing as a means of resistance—mean when considered in both these new theoretical spaces and our new pandemic times?
- Should we even be using the word *research*? Would the word *inquiry* be better (but then to what does inquiry refer)? (See Erickson, Chapter 2, this *Handbook*; see also Dimitriadis, 2016; MacLure, 2015, p. 103.)
- How do we move forward when the center no longer holds? When the field is fractured? Under assault in higher education in the form of audit culture, bibliometrics, and external funding dollars?
- What is the role of qualitative research in a historical present when the need for social justice has never been greater?
- And finally, what is the place of a new edition of the *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* in this project?

Needless to say, then, the fields of qualitative inquiry and qualitative research are in transition and have been for some time (see Erickson, Chapter 2, this *Handbook*; Torrance, Chapter 27, this *Handbook*). Postinterpretive paradigms<sup>1</sup> are on the rise, garnering increased attention in the pages of our journals and at conferences (see Kuntz, Chapter 13, this *Handbook*; Hein, Chapter 14, this *Handbook*; Koro & Cannella, Chapter 33, this *Handbook*). Older paradigms and traditional approaches are being reconfigured (see Davies, Chapter 5, this *Handbook*; Roulston, Chapter 15, this *Handbook*; Giardina & Donnelly, Chapter 17, this *Handbook*; Clarke, Friese, & Washburn, Chapter 18, this *Handbook*). Hybrid paradigms are emerging alongside new geographies of knowledge and new decolonizing epistemologies (see Kovach, Windchief, & San Pedro, Chapter 11, this *Handbook*; Chawla, Chapter 12, this *Handbook*; Moreira & Diversi, Chapter 25, this *Handbook*).

Additionally, the ontological turn in social theory over the past 10 years especially has led to a rethinking of the grounds upon which conventional humanist qualitative research is based. As St. Pierre (2021) explains, “Neither humanist qualitative nor quantitative nor mixed-methods social science research methodologies can accommodate the posts—postmodernism, poststructuralism, posthumanism, and so on” (p. 4). This poststructural refusal of “preexisting methods and methodologies” (p. 4) calls into question methods of data collection that begin with the humanist subject—methods of data analysis that use coding or thematic analysis—and refuses representational logic (St. Pierre, 2021, pp. 5–6). An example of this turn is expressed by Koró (2015), who posits the notion of “methodologies without methodology,” or the idea of “methodologies without strict boundaries or normative structures—methodologies that may begin anywhere, anytime, but by doing so can create a sense of uncertainty and loss (or mourning of stable, fixed, preconceptualized, or historical knowledge)” (p. 1). At the same time, critics such as Aagaard (2022) assert that this onto-epistemological orientation often “becomes *postempirical* inquiry” and “risks becoming a closed circle, an endless loop of philosophical exegesis that never breaks out of itself to address the real world.”

All of these developments are balanced against the lived realities of our historical present—a present that cries out for emancipatory visions, for visions that inspire transformative inquiries, for inquiries that can provide a moral compass to move people to struggle and resist oppression (see Denzin & Giardina, 2022). But what does a transformative paradigm mean under such circumstances? How do we confront inequality, poverty, suffering, racism, violence, human oppression, environmental destruction, and injustice? This is both a methodological and philosophical question, but it is also a very real concrete, pragmatic question considering how we exist as researchers in the corporate university of today (see Spooner, Chapter 30, this *Handbook*; Cheek, Chapter 31, this *Handbook*)—a structure that undergirds the politics of (our) research and increasingly governs the conduct of that research (see, e.g., Giardina & Newman, 2020).

To review:

The methodological struggles of the 1970s and 1980s, which heralded fights over the very existence of qualitative research, are both part of a distant past and yet remain very much alive as we enter the third decade of the new millennium. They remain present in the tenure battles that are waged every year by junior faculty, when their qualitative research is criticized for “lacking evidence,” not having “generalizable” findings,<sup>2</sup> or indeed not being “scientific” at all! They are alive and well in federal funding agencies and private foundations, where (post)positivist quantitative and mixed-methods studies find the most favor. They inform discourses over productivity metrics, research quality and impact, *h*-indices, and other forms of the quantified researcher self (see Cheek, 2017; Sparkes, 2021). And they come under fire from conservative and far-right politicians, who decry the use of critical race theory, feminist theory, and decolonizing efforts within the university as leftist propaganda. Wright (2006) explains that, in these new ongoing paradigm cold wars, “every overtly social justice-oriented approach to research . . . is threatened with de-legitimization by the government-sanctioned, exclusivist assertion of positivism . . . as the ‘gold standard’ of educational research” (pp. 799–800). This anti-intellectual, one-size-fits-all approach to research necessarily imposes fixed standards, checklists, and guidelines for many who conduct and evaluate qualitative research, often shoehorning such research into a postpositivist paradigm in order to align with prevailing research trends in the university.

And yet despite this emphasis on “scientific,” reproducible, generalizable forms of research, fake news and antiscience discourse continue to run rampant, pressed to the fore on social media and illustrative of illiberal forms of democracy on the rise throughout the world (Hotez, 2021). As Lee (2019) explains, “Across democracies, ‘fake news’ has flourished in current political

climates, producing misinformation on social media platforms. It has served to diminish the credibility of mainstream news networks, dividing the general public further, both ideologically and on the mere acceptance of the fact, providing credence to ideological claims of “fake news” (p. 16). And as was seen during the U.S. presidency of Donald Trump (c. 2016–2020), claims of “fake news” are increasingly deployed for strategic purposes of countering any claim one disagrees with—from climate change to election results.

The heart of these matters turns on issues surrounding the politics and ethics of evidence. This is “not a matter of evidence *or* no evidence,” as Larner (2004) stated, “but who controls the definition of evidence and which kind is acceptable to whom” (p. 20; see also Morse, 2006). The imposition of evidence-based guidelines necessarily reinforces support for postpositivist discourse. This, in turn, has led to calls by some for a strategic positivism to “play the game” from the inside (see, e.g., Wyly, 2009)—a strategy reminiscent of the use of quasi-statistics (frequencies, per cents) by an earlier generation of participant observers who counted and cross-tabulated observations in an effort to make their work more palatable to positivist colleagues (see Clarke et al., 2015, p. 37; Lather, 2013).

The critics’ model of science is anchored in the belief that there is an empirical world that is obdurate and talks back to investigators. This is an empirical science based on evidence that corroborates interpretations. This is a science that returns to and is lodged in the real, a science that stands outside nearly all of the turns listed above; this is Chicago School neo-postpositivism.

Contrast this certain science to the position of those who are concerned with the politics of evidence. Morse (2006), for example, says, “Evidence is not just something that is out there. Evidence has to be produced, constructed, represented. Furthermore, the politics of evidence cannot be separated from the ethics of evidence” (pp. 415–416). Under this model, representations of empirical reality become problematic. Objective representation of reality is impossible. Each representation calls into place a different set of ethical questions regarding evidence, including how it is obtained and what it means. But surely a middle ground can be found. If there is a return to the spirit of the paradigm dialogues of the 1980s, then multiple representations of a situation should be encouraged, perhaps placed alongside one another.

Indeed, the interpretive camp is not antiscience, *per se*. We do something different. We believe in multiple forms of science: soft, hard, strong, feminist, interpretive, critical, realist, postrealist, and posthumanist. In a sense, the traditional and postmodern projects are incommensurate. We interpret, we perform, we interrupt, we challenge, and we believe nothing is ever certain. We want performance texts that quote history back to itself, texts that focus on epiphanies; on the intersection of biography, history, culture, and politics; on turning point moments in people’s lives. The critics are correct on this point. We have a political orientation that is radical, democratic, and interventionist. Many postpositivists share these politics. The politics of evidence is thus inextricable from the politics of research (see Denzin & Giardina, 2016; Giardina & Newman, 2020).

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In this introductory chapter, we define the field of qualitative research, then navigate, chart, and review the recent history of qualitative research in the human disciplines. This will allow us to locate this *Handbook* and its contents within their historical moments. These historical moments, as we noted in the Preface, are somewhat artificial. They are socially constructed, quasi-historical, and overlapping conventions. Nevertheless, they permit a “performance” of developing ideas. Recall what Faulkner (1951) in *Requiem for a Nun* wrote of the past in the U.S.

South: “The *past* is never dead! It’s not even *past*.” The same can also be said of the paradigm wars and methodological history(ies) we write: It is not dead yet, and it is not even past. This is why we must go to such lengths to discuss these historical moments and their complexities. For it is these historical moments—overlapping and converging and often contesting and contradicting one another—that facilitate an increasing sensitivity to and sophistication about the pitfalls and promises of qualitative research. Furthermore, we present a conceptual framework for reading the qualitative research act as a multicultural, gendered process. We then provide a brief introduction to each of the chapters, concluding with a brief discussion of views on qualitative research in the present moment. We have chosen to use the metaphor of the lattice—or interlaced structure—to visualize what follows, for we see the *Handbook* serving as the connective tissue running everywhere, interconnecting between historical moments, politics, the decolonization project, research methods, paradigms, and communities of interpretive scholars.

### INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES—PAST, PRESENT, AND INTO THE FUTURE<sup>3</sup>

This new century has been characterized by the intersection of multiple discourses, new ways of navigating the paradigmatic waters of and between positivism, postpositivism, critical theory, constructionism, poststructuralism, participatory modes of inquiry, and the “new” posts such as posthumanism (see Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, Chapter 4, this *Handbook*). Although there exist multiple camps holding true to their particular methodological, epistemological, ontological, and axiological views, there remains a kind of “unity in difference” (to borrow from Stuart Hall) under the umbrella of the “interpretive, performance paradigm.” From autoethnography to postcolonial discourse analysis, from symbolic interactionism, to situational and constructionist versions of grounded theory, from ethnodrama, and ethnotheatre, to postphenomenology, to critical theory, to new versions of standpoint theory, to materialist, antiracist, Indigenous, LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning, intersex, asexual and/or ally) liberatory social justice discourses (Clark et al., 2015, pp. 38, 40, 47; Walter & Anderson, 2013), this unity represents the “globalizing acceptance of qualitative inquiry, in its many forms, graduate programs, to journals, book series, and conferences. Critical qualitative inquiry is now an integral part of an international, interpretive public social science discourse” (see Clarke et al., 2015, p. 37; see also Burawoy, 2005, p. 511; Knoblauch, 2014).

#### Mapping Qualitative Inquiry

In the fifth edition of the *Handbook*, Kamberelis et al. (2017) utilized a model of the figured world—or interpretive community of practice with shared understandings—to illustrate the field of qualitative inquiry. They proposed five basic figured worlds, each one dynamic and evolving rather than fixed or static. These five worlds involve assumptions concerning knowledge, research questions, relations between subjects and objects, reality, and language. They gave them familiar labels: (1) positivist (objectivism); (2) interpretive (modernism); (3) skepticism, praxis (critical); (4) power/knowledge (poststructural); and (5) ontological (postqualitative, postmaterialism). These figured worlds map onto Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba’s (2011) five-paradigm model (positivism, postpositivism, critical theory, constructivism, participatory-postmodern), which combines ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions (pp. 98–102).

The Kamberelis, Dimitriadis, and Welker five-figured space model, like the Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba paradigm framework, travels across and into uncharted spaces. We now have,

for example, a sixth figured world—a new post-post space. To simplify, their model marks the importance of using specific research methodologies to answer concrete questions (World 1), in specific ethnographic spaces (World 2), while critically engaging praxis and dialogue (World 3); language and discourse (World 4); the effects of materiality, affect, and performance (World 5); and imagining new becomings, returns, departures, and detours (World 6). This new sixth world is informed by postcolonial, Indigenous, transnational, global, and multiple realities made possible through a *mélange* of approaches with new digital technologies (see Kozinets & Gretzel, Chapter 20, this *Handbook*), art as research (see Siegesmund, Chapter 23, this *Handbook*), and posthuman futures (see Koro & Cannella, Chapter 33, this *Handbook*).

Despite the institutional and political challenges to qualitative research (discussed in the Preface), the social science tent has undeniably grown larger over the past 30 years. Or, at the least, there are now many different versions of what is science. Eisenhart (2006), for example, proposes a model of qualitative science that is interpretive (see, e.g., Geertz, 1973) and practical. Like Flyvberg (2001, 2011), she wants a science that matters, a science based on common sense, focused on values and power, relevant to the needs of ordinary citizens and policy makers. At the same time, there are related calls for local science, for new ontologies and epistemologies (critical realism), Indigenous science, interpretive science, posthuman science, postmaterialist science, decolonizing sciences, science as a socially situated practice, and science based on feminist standpoint methodologies (Harding, 2005). Burawoy (2005) calls for a policy-oriented, nonelitist, organic public social science. Here the scholar collaborates with local communities of practice, neighborhood associations, and labor and social justice movements (Burawoy, 2005, pp. 511–512; see also Smith & McGannon, Chapter 28, this *Handbook*). These alternatives to traditional positivist science improve the status of qualitative inquiry in the current political and higher education environment. They offer strategic forms of resistance to the narrow, hegemonic scientifically based research framework that dominated the discourse circa 2000 to 2010. It is no longer possible to talk about a monolithic model of science. The mantle of authority has been decentralized, if not completely tarnished.

However, perhaps the QUAN/QUAL divide is, as Flyvbjerg (2011) writes, a war that no longer needs fighting, at least from the perspective of critical inquiry (p. 313). Radical feminists are using biostatistics and pursuing biosocial studies. Poststructuralists and posthumanists are interrogating the underlying assumptions and practices that operate in the era of big data, digital technologies, the data sciences, software analytics, and the diverse practices of numeracy (de Freitas et al., 2016). Alternative ontologies and the subversive uses of statistics question the kinds of computational practices that saturate everyday life (de Freitas et al., 2016). Indeed, there are evermore international associations, institutes, and conferences at which qualitative research is practiced and privileged—for example, the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI); European Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ECQI); Asian Qualitative Research Association (AQRA), Contemporary Ethnography Across the Disciplines (CEAD); the Qualitative Health Research (QHR) conference; Qualitative Research in Sport & Exercise (QRSE) conference; the Qualitative Methods (QM) conference; the Qualitative Analysis Conference; Advances in Qualitative Methods conference; the International Symposium of Autoethnography and Narrative Inquiry; the Taos Institute; and the International Institute for Qualitative Methodology at the University of Alberta, Canada. (To say nothing of the dozens and dozens of scholarly journals the focus on qualitative methods specifically.)

There has thus been a widescale legitimatization of interpretive, poststructural research across the curricula of the social sciences, humanities, professional education, health sciences,

communications, education, computer and information science, military, science education, and applied linguistics. This has been accompanied by the development of sophisticated participatory, community and cooperative action discourses, as well as critical Indigenous decolonizing interventions (see Kovach, Windchief, & San Pedro, Chapter 11, this *Handbook*; Gómez Gonzalez, Chapter 24, this *Handbook*).

Yet challenges still remain despite this groundswell of support for and use of qualitative methods across the ideological and paradigmatic spectrum of inquiry. As higher education continues to reflect a neoliberal, corporate, commercial approach to research, scholars face a mounting bevy of accountability and performance indicators, hurdles, and roadblocks. As Spooner and McNinch (2018) explain,

We live in an age in which value is often equated with accountancy, in which we are increasingly governed by and through numbers, incentives, de-incentives, and competitive benchmarking (Shore & Wright, 2015). Examples include official and unofficial funding and impact metric targets, journal impact facts, h-indexes, and even the very reporting system used to provide these data, all of which have the power to guide and coerce our behaviors in subtle and not so subtle ways. (p. 3)

Within the corporate university, rhetoric of “efficiency,” “networking,” “workforce needs,” “return on investment,” “cost-effectiveness,” and “economies of scale” dominate. New tenure-track lines continue to decrease in number, replaced by temporary adjunct labor and full-time but nontenure-earning “academic teaching professionals” who bear the brunt of undergraduate teaching. And political challenges to theories, topics, and departments (e.g., critical race theory, whiteness studies, gender and women’s studies) continue to proliferate. This is the context in which qualitative researchers reside, facing challenges on all sides.

### History, Politics, and Paradigms<sup>4</sup>

To better understand where we are today and to better grasp current criticisms, it is useful to return to the paradigm wars of the 1980s, which resulted in the serious crippling of quantitative research in education. Teddlie and Tashakkori’s (2003, 2011) history is helpful here. They demarcate at least three paradigm wars, or periods of conflict: the postpositivist-constructivist war against positivism (1970–1990)<sup>5</sup>; the conflict between competing postpositivist, constructivist, and critical theory paradigms (1990–2005); and the recent conflict between evidence-based methodologists and the mixed methods, interpretive, and critical theory schools (2005–present).<sup>6</sup>

The cornerstone of the 1980s paradigm war turned on complex arguments that moved between axiological, ontological, epistemic, epistemological, and methodological levels: (a) Quantitative and qualitative methods were fundamentally different, the QUAN–QUAL incompatibility paradigm thesis; (b) interpretive or theoretical paradigms could not be combined, the epistemic, incommensurability thesis; (c) there is no value- or theory-free inquiry, the antipositivism thesis; (d) paradigms are incommensurable, the purist thesis; and (e) methods have incompatible assumptions, meaning they cannot be combined (Donmoyer, 2006, p. 23; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003, p. 7).

According to Gage (1989), during the 1980s, the paradigm wars resulted in the weakening of quantitative research in education, the result of attacks from antinaturalists, interpretivists, and critical theorists. Ethnographic studies flourished. Exponents of critical pedagogy, critical theory, and feminist analysis fostered struggles to acquire power and

cultural capital for racial and ethnic minorities, the socioeconomically disadvantaged, and those identifying as LGBTQIA+ (Gage, 1989). Constructivism and postpositivism were in the ascendancy; positivism was on its way out.

By some measure, Guba's (1990) *The Paradigm Dialog* signaled an end to the 1980s wars. Postpositivists, constructivists, and critical theorists talked to one another, working through issues connected to ethics, field studies, praxis, criteria, knowledge accumulation, truth, significance, graduate training, values, and politics. This ushered in a new round of arguments and debates over paradigm superiority, and conflict broke out between the many different empowerment pedagogies: feminist, antiracist, radical, Freirean, liberation theology, postmodernists, poststructuralists, cultural studies, and so forth (see Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Erickson, Chapter 2, this *Handbook*).<sup>7</sup> Special interest groups committed to particular paradigms appeared, some with their own journals.<sup>8</sup>

The second paradigm war also involved disputes “between individuals convinced of the ‘paradigm purity’ of their own position” (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2003, p. 7). Purists resurrected the incommensurability and incompatibility theses from the first war. They extended and repeated the argument that quantitative and qualitative methods, postpositivism, and the other “isms” could not be combined due to the differences between their underlying paradigmatic assumptions. On the methodological front, the incompatibility thesis was challenged by those who invoked triangulation as a way of combining multiple methods to study the same phenomenon (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2003, p. 7). Thus was a new round of arguments and debates over paradigm superiority ushered in.

A third war, characterized by a soft, apolitical pragmatic paradigm, emerged in this post-1990 period. Suddenly, quantitative and qualitative methods became compatible, and researchers could use both in their empirical inquiries (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2003, p. 7). This moment was highlighted by calls for pragmatism and the promotion of the compatibility thesis (see Howe, 1988). Mixed-methods research—what Clark et al. (2008) define “as a design for collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a study in order to understand a research problem” (p. 364)—would come of age in this moment as a disciplinary approach unto itself with the founding of the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research (JMMR)* in 2007 and later the Mixed Methods International Research Association in 2014. Such was the widespread impact of mixed methods felt that only a decade later (in 2018), *JMMR* had attained a Journal Citation Reports Impact Factor of 3.524, ranking it first out of 98 journals in the “Social Sciences, Interdisciplinary” category.<sup>9</sup> Proponents made appeals to a “what works” pragmatic argument, contending that “no incompatibility between quantitative and qualitative methods exists at either the level of practice or that of epistemology . . . there are thus no good reasons for educational researchers to fear forging ahead with ‘what works’” (Howe, 1988, p. 16). *Of course, what works is more than an empirical question. It involves the politics of evidence.*

Mills (1959) would likely say this mixed-methods movement is a space for abstracted empiricism, a place where inquiry is cut off from politics. But it is clear that a legacy of the 1980s paradigm wars was a ready-made institutional apparatus that privileged a resurgent postpositivism involving experimentalism, mixed methodologies, and “governmental incursion into the spaces of research methods” (Lather, 2006, p. 35). These institutional structures converged when neoliberalism, postpositivism, and the audit-accountability culture took aim on education and schooling (the result of the Reading Excellence Act of 1998 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 in the United States). Here we saw scientifically based research defined and codified within federal law. That is, the Reading Excellence Act privileged “scientifically based” research, which

was defined as “systematic, empirical methods for observation of experiment”; produced “rigorous data analyses adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the conclusions drawn”; and utilized “measurements or observational methods that provide valid data across evaluators and observers and across multiple measurements and observations.” The No Child Left Behind Act similarly defined scientifically based research as “research that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs.” Within these definitions, biography and history recede into the background. Technological rationality prevails. The watchwords: audits, efficiency, high-stakes assessment, test-based accountability, “scientifically based” research. It was only a matter of time before this apparatus would take aim at qualitative research and create protocols for evaluating qualitative research studies.

## TOWARD A NEW PARADIGM DIALOG(S)

Twenty years ago, Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003, 2011, p. 286) used the term “third methodological moment” to describe an epistemological position that evolved out the discussions and controversies associated with the 1980s paradigm wars. The third moment mediated quantitative and qualitative disputes by finding a third way, or middle ground. However, it’s a bit more complicated than that. Extending Teddlie and Tashakkori, there were in fact two distinct two versions of the third moment. The first is the mixed-methods version of the moment. The second is a somewhat more radical position—a version anchored in the critical interpretive social science traditions that endorses paradigm proliferation (Donmoyer, 2006).

In the first version of this moment, the incompatibility and incommensurability theses are rejected, substituted for the complementary strengths thesis, which promotes the use of a combination of methods that have complementary strengths and nonoverlapping weaknesses (see, e.g., Johnson & Christensen, 2016, p. 472). This view is now accepted by many in the mixed-methods community. Here is where history starts to be rewritten, however. Many took the acceptance of complementarity to mean that multiple paradigms could be used unproblematically in the same mixed-methods inquiry (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003, p. 23). Despite this ontological confusion, its relative popularity (or misuse) in the field signaled the demise of the single theoretical and/or methodological paradigm (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003, p. 24).

The demise of the incompatibility thesis, as it applied to methods and paradigms, was “a major catalyst in the development of mixed methods as a distinct third methodological moment” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003, p. 24; 2011, p. 289). Although this development was not without criticism,<sup>10</sup> the mixed-methods discourse introduced complex discussions involving design typologies, logistics, validity, data, standards, inferences, and findings that can be generalized from studies which combine quantitative (QUAN) and qualitative (QUAL) methodologies. For some, this was a welcomed political development as it enabled them to work more easily and successfully within the audit and funding culture spaces—opening new avenues for some forms of qualitative research while simultaneously closing doors on others. The downside, however, was that inquiry became disconnected from content; method (or, more accurately, methodolatry<sup>11</sup>) prevails, while issues of justice—or of doing science that matters—recede into the background.

The second version of this third moment is a bit more complex, presenting a space that is primarily filled by the many branches of the global interpretive community. One group of scholars in this space works across three directions at the same time: (1) They are critically engaging and critiquing the scientifically-based research (SBR) movement, (2) they are emphasizing the political and moral consequences of the narrow views of science that are embedded in the movement



(see, e.g., St. Pierre & Roulston, 2006), and (3) they are asking questions about the politics of evidence, about how work can be done for social justice purposes.

A second group of scholars celebrates paradigm proliferation (Donmoyer, 2006; Lather, 2006) and the profusion of interpretive communities. They do not necessarily endorse the incompatibility theses that are so important for the mixed-methods community. They understand that each community has differing interpretive criteria. This discourse functions as a firewall of sorts against the narrow view of nonpositivism held by SBR authors.

Still, a third group of scholars resisted the implementation of narrow views of ethics, human subject review boards, institutional review boards (IRB), informed consent, and biomedical models of inquiry (see Christians, 2017). They challenged the notion of IRB “mission creep,” or the “simultaneous overregulation and underprotection” of the research act due to a “focus on procedures and documentation at the expense of thoughtful consideration of the difficult ethical questions surrounding the welfare of human subjects” (Gunsalus et al., 2006). This mission creep contributed in part to the “management” of qualitative research, with review boards filled with quantitative researchers questioning and/or passing judgment on qualitative research and its design (including a lack of statistical-probabilistic generalizability and so forth). Moreover, Nelson (2004) points out that when biomedical understandings of risk and “respect for persons” are applied to qualitative research, “an IRB can effectively become a virtual police force in the service of liberal humanism—enforcing across campus a philosophy of liberal humanism and its ‘respect for persons’” (p. 210). Such operations go beyond technical aspects of research design and conduct to interfere with academic freedom. As Tierney and Corwin (2007) explain, the IRB apparatus as presently constituted necessarily works to “constrain the actions of the academic” (p. 394) through the latent weaponizing of questions of consent, restrictions on what questions can be asked (and where they can be asked), and passing judgment on the relative worth or merit of research designs (pp. 394–396).

## Performance, Affect, and the New Materialisms

Within the interpretive tradition, there exists (at least) an additional, fourth methodological moment. Work within this formation represents a break from earlier traditions, leaving behind conventional humanist inquiry and moving to theories of posthumanism, agential realism, diffraction, intra-action, and the new materialisms. Sorting through all of the various theoretical positions related to this fourth moment is outside the scope of what is possible in the context of this Introduction (but see Hein, Chapter 14, this *Handbook*). Briefly summarized, research in this space does not share a similar ontology of human being to conventional humanism. For this reason, Lather and St. Pierre (2013) argue, rethinking humanist ontology is of prime importance for thinking through what “comes next” after humanist qualitative methodology. As they write,

If we cease to privilege knowing over being; if we refuse positivist and phenomenological assumptions about the nature of lived experience and the world; if we give up representational and binary logics; if we see language, the human, and the material not as separate entities mixed together but as completely imbricated ‘on the surface’—if we do all that and the ‘more’ it will open up—will qualitative inquiry as we know it be possible? Perhaps not. (pp. 629–630)

Coole and Frost (2010) describe three general themes that frame this discourse: first, an ontological reorientation that is posthumanist in the sense that it conceives of matter itself as exhibiting agency; second, biopolitical and bioethical issues concerning the status of life and of the human; and third, the new scholarship reengages political economy, emphasizing the

relationship between the material details of everyday life and broader geopolitical and socio-economic structure (pp. 6–7, paraphrase). The shift from Derridean to DeleuzoGuattarian informed theoretical assemblages (see Newman et al., 2020), alongside the broader configurations informed by the likes of Barad, Braidotti, Bennet, DeLanda, and Grosz (among others), has put into relief how “knowing is as dependent on the coming together of things, places, and feelings as it is on language” (Mellander & Wiszmeg, 2016, p. 99).

For the new materialists, terms such as *agency*, *voice*, *subject*, *experience*, *presence*, *self*, *narrative*, *subjectivity*, *meaning*, *mind*, *consciousness*, *data*, *analysis*, *interpretation*, and *science* are to be used carefully, if at all. They privilege discourse, mind, and culture over matter, body, and nature. They are the remnants of an outdated humanism, and their continued use reproduces a postpositivist interpretive discourse (see MacLure, 2015). The materialist critique opens up new spaces, new terms, post-human bodies, new ontologies of being and inquiry, a move away from epistemology, new views of voice, presence and performance, the mangle of post-human bodies, new body-machine-material entanglements (see Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 123).

The materialists challenge traditional qualitative researchers who rely on neopositivist and postpositivist traditional ethnographic approaches to rethink their assumptions. To give an example, in her recent book *Diffractional Ethnography: Social Sciences and the Ontological Turn*, Gullion (2018) sets out to reconcile the philosophical debate over the ontological turn with empirical social science research. She writes,

As a sociologist, I’ve been trained to set my gaze on human social interactions. But what about the rest of the world, in which these interactions occur? Is all of reality socially constructed (through language), or does a reality exist outside of humans, a reality with its own ontologies and epistemologies? Are humans the only entities with agency? Does agency require language? (p. 3)

The same consideration is needed for interviewing. Mazzei (2013) explains that interviewing, which is a classic social science technique for generating empirical material widely accepted throughout academia, has been fundamentally situated within humanist theories of the subject, which “typically equate words spoken by participants in interviews and then transcribed into words in interview transcripts as data . . . in which that voice is produced by a unique, essentialist subject” (p. 732). She counters this view by positing how, within a posthumanist stance, “interview data, the voices of participants, cannot be thought as emanating from an essentialist subject nor can they be separated from the enactment in which they are produced, an enactment of researcher-data-participants-theory-analysis—what I call here a *Voice without Organs* (VwO)” (p. 732). This is because “voice as present, stable, authentic, and self-reflective is laden with humanist properties and thus attached to *an* individual” (Mazzei 2016, p. 152).<sup>12</sup>

Clearly, the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the new materialists and the traditional, classical ethnographers are vastly different, making the approaches incompatible (Clarke et al., 2015, p. 40). Borrowing from Kuntz (2015), new materialist thought presents qualitative researchers with productive ontological, epistemological, methodological, and ethical possibilities that cannot be ignored—most important, thinking through the implications of “truth-telling with the aim of intervening within normative practices of knowing and being” (p. 22). The materialist turn opens up spaces for the notion of postmethod, the spaces of the postqualitative, methodologies without boundaries, methodologies that may go anywhere, methodologies that create a sense of uncertainty, mourning and loss, methodologies doing social justice work, truth telling for social change (pp. 12–13, 82 paraphrase).

In the fifth edition of the *Handbook*, we wrote that this new paradigm was “on the horizon.” Given the developments in the past 5 years, it is safe to say it has arrived. Indeed, work of this kind is regularly found in the pages of our journals (e.g., *Qualitative Inquiry*, *International Review of Qualitative Research*), at conference sessions, and in books dedicated to thinking through this new turn (see, e.g., Fairchild et al., 2022; Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2017; Murriss, 2021; Rousell, 2021; Thomas & Bellingham, 2020). And here in the sixth edition, there are new chapters that specifically address or otherwise engage with this turn (see Davies, Chapter 5, this *Handbook*; Kuntz, Chapter 13, this *Handbook*; Hein, Chapter 14, this *Handbook*; Roulston, Chapter 15, this *Handbook*; and Koro & Cannella, Chapter 33, this *Handbook*). And while the “new materialisms” promise to go beyond the old antagonisms of nature and culture, science and the social, discourse and matter, this turn is still in its relative infancy, an empty canvas upon which to continue sketching a becoming future.

## RESISTANCES TO QUALITATIVE STUDIES

The academic and disciplinary resistances to qualitative research illustrate the politics embedded in this field of discourse. The challenges to qualitative research are many. To better understand these criticisms, it is necessary to “distinguish analytically the political (or external) role of [qualitative] methodology from the procedural (or internal) one” (Seale et al., 2004, p. 7). Politics situate methodology inside and outside the academy. Procedural issues define how qualitative methodology is used to produce knowledge about the world (Seale et al., 2004, p. 7). Often, the political and the procedural intersect. Politicians and hard scientists derisively call qualitative researchers *journalists* or “soft” scientists. Their work is termed unscientific, only exploratory, or subjective. It is called criticism and not theory, or it is interpreted politically, as a disguised version of Marxism or secular humanism.

These political and procedural resistances reflect an uneasy awareness that the interpretive traditions of qualitative research commit one to a critique of the positivist or postpositivist project. But the positivist resistance to qualitative research goes beyond the “ever-present desire to maintain a distinction between hard science and soft scholarship” (Carey, 1989, p. 99). The experimental (positivist) sciences (physics, chemistry, economics, and psychology, for example) are often seen as the crowning achievements of Western civilization, and in their practices, it is assumed that “truth” can transcend opinion and personal bias (Carey, 1989, p. 99). Qualitative research is seen as an assault on this tradition, whose adherents often retreat into a “value-free objectivist science” (Carey, 1989, p. 104) model to defend their position. Positivists seldom attempt to make explicit and critique the “moral and political commitments in their own contingent work” (Carey, 1989, p. 104; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, Chapter 4, this *Handbook*).

Positivists and postpositivists further allege that the so-called new experimental qualitative researchers write fiction, not science, and have no way of verifying their truth statements. Ethnographic poetry and fiction signal the death of empirical science, and there is little to be gained by attempting to engage in moral criticism. These critics presume a stable, unchanging reality that can be studied with the empirical methods of objective social science (see Huber, 1995). The province of qualitative research, accordingly, is the world of lived experience, for this is where individual belief and action intersect with culture. Under this model, there is no preoccupation with discourse and method as material interpretive practices that constitute representation and description. This is the textual, narrative turn rejected by the positivists. The opposition to positivist science by poststructuralists is seen, then, as an attack on reason and

truth. At the same time, the positivist science attack on qualitative research is regarded as an attempt to legislate one version of truth over another.

This is a deeply troubling position to privilege. Writing about scientific research, including qualitative research from the vantage point of the colonized, a position that she chooses to privilege, Smith (1999) wrote in her landmark book *Decolonizing Methodologies* that “the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism.” She continues, “The word itself is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary. . . . It is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism” (p. 1), with the ways in which “knowledge about indigenous peoples was collected, classified, and then represented back to the West” (p. 1). This dirty word stirs up anger, silence, distrust. “It is so powerful that Indigenous people even write poetry about research” (Smith, 1999, p. 1); it is one of colonialism’s most “sordid legacies.”<sup>13</sup>

## HISTORICAL MOMENTS

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Qualitative research is a field of inquiry in its own right. It crosscuts disciplines, fields, and subject matter. A complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions surrounds the term. These include the traditions associated with foundationalism, positivism, postfoundationalism, postpositivism, poststructuralism, postmodernism, posthumanism, and the many qualitative research perspectives and methods connected to cultural and interpretive studies (the chapters in Part II of this *Handbook* engage with these paradigms). There are separate and detailed literatures on the many methods and approaches that fall under the category of qualitative research, such as case study, politics and ethics, participatory inquiry, interviewing, participant observation, visual methods, and interpretive analysis.

As argued previously, in North America, qualitative inquiry operates in a complex historical field that crosscuts (at least) 11 historical moments. We define them as the traditional (1900–1950); the modernist or golden age (1950–1970); blurred genres (1970–1980); the paradigm wars (1980–1985); the crisis of representation (1986–1990); the postmodern (1990–1995); postexperimental inquiry (1995–2000); the methodologically contested present (2000–2004); paradigm proliferation (2005–2010); the fractured, posthumanist turn (2010–2015); and the uncertain, utopian future-present, where critical inquiry finds its voice in the public arena (2016–present)—all of which continue to overlap and converge and evolve.

This historical model has been termed a progress narrative by Alasuutari (2004, pp. 599–600; see also Atkinson et al., 2003; Seale et al., 2004, p. 2). Some of our critics assert that we all-too-easily believe that the most recent moment is the most up-to-date, the avant-garde, the cutting edge (Alasuutari, 2004, p. 601).<sup>14</sup> Naturally, we dispute this reading, acknowledging that there are many productive qualitative projects and formations at play in any given moment. As well, we remain critical of some developments related to the posthumanist/postqualitative turn, yet feature them in this new edition of the *Handbook* because of the interest they have generated in the field and the productive conversations that can emerge by highlighting these emergent, potentially transformative turns.

Successive waves of epistemological theorizing move across these moments. The traditional period is associated with the positivist, foundational paradigm. The modernist or golden age and blurred genres moments are connected to the appearance of postpositivist arguments. At the same time, a variety of new interpretive, qualitative perspectives were taken up, including hermeneutics, structuralism, semiotics, phenomenology, cultural studies, and feminism. In the blurred genre phase, the humanities became central resources for critical, interpretive theory

and the qualitative research project broadly conceived. The researcher became a *bricoleur* (as discussed later), learning how to borrow from many different disciplines.

The blurred genres phase produced the next stage, the crisis of representation. Here researchers struggled with how to locate themselves and their subjects in reflexive texts. A kind of methodological diaspora took place, a two-way exodus. Humanists migrated to the social sciences, searching for new social theory and new ways to study popular culture and its local ethnographic contexts. Social scientists turned to the humanities, hoping to learn how to do complex structural and poststructural readings of social texts. From the humanities, social scientists also learned how to produce texts that refused to be read in simplistic, linear, incontrovertible terms. The line between a text and a context blurred. In the postmodern experimental moment, researchers continued to move away from foundational and quasifoundational criteria—the end of grand narratives was upon us. Alternative evaluative criteria were sought, ones that might prove evocative, moral, critical, and rooted in local understandings.

The postmodern experimental movement led into the moment of postexperimental inquiry, a time when fictional ethnographies, ethnographic poetry, and emerging forms of multimedia texts were taken for granted as part of an accepted new normal, though not necessarily part of the mainstream of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 17). Postexperimental writers sought to connect their writings to the needs of a free democratic society, and the demands of a moral and sacred qualitative social science were actively explored by scholars who cut across disciplinary divides.

Despite these changes, qualitative researchers at the start of the new millennia became faced with a methodologically contested present—one characterized by conflicts and tensions brought about by changes in the landscape of neoliberal higher education, research metrics, funding, and so forth. That is, qualitative inquiry came to mean different things to different people at different times (see Smith & Sparkes, 2016), largely though not exclusively the result of the politics of research informing their everyday lived experiences. Consider just the realm of ethnography, where multiple forms of the ethnographic project fractured along narrative, critical, collaborative, queer, global, grounded, situational, performative, feminist, decolonizing, meta, co-constructed, duo, and embodied forms—developments that put concepts of ethnographic performance, meaning, voice, presence, and representation under contestation and erasure (see Denzin & Giardina, 2017).

The paradigm proliferation that followed was thus not unexpected, as the mixed-methods communities came of age (see below), debates over incompatibility and incommensurability waged on, and federal legislation and funding priorities brought into being a context in which “what works” became the watchword, especially for funded research. The evidence-based movement had thus struck back, supported by measures such as the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) “What Works Clearinghouse” (established in 2002). As Lather (2006) notes, “a resurgent positivism and government incursion into the space of research methods” was coming into sharp relief (p. 35).

Internal tensions within qualitative research continued into the tenth moment, as postqualitative/posthumanist scholars took aim at conventional humanist qualitative research (detailed previously). St. Pierre (2017), for one, categorized this time as one of looking back and understanding the ground on which humanist research was not only based, but upon which it had become normalized and taken for granted. As she writes,

The conventional humanist qualitative methodology described in textbooks and handbooks and university research courses is, indeed, an invention, a fiction—we made it up. For that reason, we must understand that its taken-for-granted processes, procedures,

and practices now embedded in powerful institutional forces are aligned with a Platonic, Cartesian, modernist, representational, transcendent trajectory, which Deleuze (1968/1994) would likely call a ‘dogmatic image of thought.’ (p. 38)

But as St. Pierre and a host of other post-scholars remind us, *post*qualitative research does not share a similar ontology of human being. For this reason, Lather and St. Pierre (2013) argue, rethinking humanist ontology is of prime importance for thinking through what “comes next” after humanist qualitative methodology. As they write,

If we cease to privilege knowing over being; if we refuse positivist and phenomenological assumptions about the nature of lived experience and the world; if we give up representational and binary logics; if we see language, the human, and the material not as separate entities mixed together but as completely imbricated ‘on the surface’—if we do all that and the ‘more’ it will open up—will qualitative inquiry as we know it be possible? Perhaps not. (pp. 629–630)

There is clearly a growing constituency of researchers subscribing to the postqualitative imagination, evidenced by the increase in the sheer number of journal articles, books, and conference presentations that focus on how to think and do research in a postqualitative space.

Our current moment, as an amalgamation of the previous 10 moments that came before, is one of an uncertain, utopian future-present. Collectively and collaboratively, this moment calls for a critical, performative, social justice inquiry directed at the multiple crises of our historical present. We need a rethinking of where we have been and, crucially, where we are going—and how we will get there. Our inquiry must meet the demands of our hopeful—but evolving—future. It is in the hands of the qualitative research community to intervene into the challenges and demands that we face—to be present to the history that we all shape. These challenges and demands may require us to rethink our ethical, political, and methodological moorings—especially in an evolving COVID-19 landscape. And although we do not know what the future may hold, we must ensure our voices will be heard as we continue to intervene into the spaces of the everyday—working toward a more diverse, inclusive, and transformative present.

## DEFINITIONAL ISSUES: RESEARCH VERSUS INQUIRY

Any definition of qualitative research must work within the complex historical field set out above. Qualitative research means different things in each of these moments. Nonetheless, an initial, generic definition can be offered. *Qualitative research* is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research 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 fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and performances, including memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. What this means is that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, which are socially constructed, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection (or construction, or generation) of a variety of empirical materials—case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, artifacts, and cultural texts and productions, along with observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings

in individuals' lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices, hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand. It is understood, however, that each practice makes the world visible in a different way. Hence, there is frequently a commitment to practices such as triangulation (see Flick, 2018) and using more than one interpretive practice in any study.

However, and following the ontological turn in materialist discourse, Dimitriadis (2016) makes an important distinction between inquiry and research. Throughout the paradigm wars, qualitative researchers fought for a place at the table, resisting positivist domination from the SBR machine. They worked from a long and distinguished humanist, interpretive tradition, a tradition that extended from Weber and Mead to Geertz and Turner. It becomes fully robust in the recent-present moment, with tangled up versions of critical race theory, feminist theories, class theories, critical theory, empowerment discourses, all the way to autoethnography. And it manifests itself in messy texts, texts with multiple voices, interrogations of terms like *truth*, *validity*, *voice*, and *data*. Suddenly, qualitative research was carrying the weight of the interpretive tradition on its shoulders.

Dimitriadis, though, wonders if it would be better to retire the word *research* altogether and entertain for the moment the use of the word *inquiry*. Inquiry does not carry the trappings of the word *research*, which is tainted by a lingering positivism. Inquiry implies an open-endedness, uncertainty, ambiguity, praxis, pedagogies of liberation, freedom, resistance. More pointedly, in this orientation, we find debates occurring at the level of the *philosophical* (i.e., philosophy of inquiry, philosophy of science) rather than a discussion over the use or application of particular research methods (or “tools”). This is an important consideration, as many pedagogical forays in qualitative research are oriented around the teaching of particular *methods* rather than philosophical engagement with questions of epistemology, ontology, and axiology.

For this reason, students in qualitative methods survey courses typically learn about interviews, focus groups, case study, ethnography, participant observation, mixed-methods research, and visual methods; if they are lucky, they might also learn how to conduct narrative analysis, phenomenological studies, and critical discourse analysis and use digital methods.<sup>15</sup> If they are very lucky, there might also be some discussion of paradigms (positivism, constructivism, etc.) or the philosophy of science. However, this presents a practical conundrum: balancing the limitations and expedience of generalist research methods courses to introduce a range of methods to novice students versus conveying to and engaging them with a critical language with which to think through the underlying philosophical assumptions of the research act. Appelbaum (1995) rightly contends that “the impulse to rely on method (to ‘marry’ it) is strong. The attraction of method is its easy availability. It gives itself over to whomever calls upon it. . . . [But] the danger of method is that it gives itself over to mechanical replacement” (p. 89). Law (2004) similarly suggests that the problem with method is not so much lack of variety in the practical application method or that we simply need better methods—for there are certainly a plethora of different methods at our disposal—but in the “dominatory pretensions of certain versions or accounts of method, of the normativity of method, that currently prevails within the social sciences” (p. 5). In either case, research is reduced to the technical execution of particular methods—that is, a methods-driven approach.<sup>16</sup>

We could go one step further, however, and make the performance turn—the human-being-as-performer, not as researcher or inquirer. A performative project, informed by research and inquiry, involves acting in the world so as to make it visible for social transformations. This is a postinquiry world, one defined by risk taking, by textual experimentation, by ontologies of transformation. It is a world defined by acts of love, struggles, and resistance, a world shaped by dramatic, radical acts of activism (Madison, 2010). Importantly, Madison (2012)

reminds us that “if we accept the notion of human beings as *homo performans* and therefore as a performing species, performance becomes necessary for our survival” (p. 166). In fact, it is a constant in everyday life, which is why one community of post-researchers has turned to a performance-based vocabulary (see Adams & Holman Jones, Chapter 21, this *Handbook*; Moreira & Diversi, Chapter 25, this *Handbook*; Saldaña, Chapter 22, this *Handbook*; and Siegesmund, Chapter 23, this *Handbook*).

## THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCHER-AS-BRICOLEUR

Multiple gendered images may be brought to the qualitative researcher: scientist, naturalist, fieldworker, journalist, social critic, artist, performer, jazz musician, filmmaker, quilt maker, essayist. The many methodological practices of qualitative research may be viewed as soft science, journalism, ethnography, ethnotheatre, ethnodrama, *bricolage*, quilt making, or montage. The researcher, in turn, may be seen as a *bricoleur*—a Jack or Jill of all trades or professional do-it-yourself person (see Levi-Strauss, 1962/1966, p. 17). There are many kinds of bricoleurs—interpretive, narrative, theoretical, political. The interpretive bricoleur produces a bricolage—that is, a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation: “The solution (bricolage) which is the result of the bricoleur’s method is an [emergent] construction” (Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991, p. 161), which changes and takes new forms as different tools, methods, and techniques of representation and interpretation are added to the puzzle. Nelson et al. (1992) likewise describe one form of cultural studies “as a bricolage. Its choice of practice, that is, is pragmatic, strategic, and self-reflexive” (p. 2).

The methodological bricoleur is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks, ranging from interviewing to intensive self-reflection and introspection. The theoretical bricoleur reads widely and is knowledgeable about the many interpretive paradigms (feminism, Marxism, cultural studies, constructivism, queer theory, posthumanism) that can be brought to any particular problem. They may not, however, feel that paradigms can be mingled or synthesized. If paradigms are overarching philosophical systems denoting particular ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies, one cannot move easily from one to the other. Paradigms represent belief systems that attach the user to a particular worldview. Perspectives, in contrast, are less well-developed systems, and it can be easier to move between them. The researcher-as-bricoleur-theorist works between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms.

The interpretive bricoleur understands that research is an interactive process shaped by one’s personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting. Critical bricoleurs stress the dialectical and hermeneutic nature of interdisciplinary inquiry, knowing that the boundaries between traditional disciplines no longer hold (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 683). The political bricoleur knows that science is power, for all research findings have political implications. There is no value-free science. A civic social science based on a politics of hope is sought (Lincoln, 1999). The gendered, narrative bricoleur also knows that researchers all tell stories about the worlds they have studied. Thus, the narratives or stories scientists tell are accounts couched and framed within specific storytelling traditions, often defined as paradigms (e.g., positivism, postpositivism, constructivism). The product of the interpretive bricoleur’s labor is a complex, quilt-like bricolage, a reflexive collage or montage—a set of fluid, interconnected images and representations. This interpretive structure is like a quilt, a performance text, or a sequence of representations connecting the parts to the whole.



## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AS A SITE OF MULTIPLE INTERPRETIVE PRACTICES

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Qualitative research, as a set of interpretive activities, privileges no single methodological practice over another. As a site of discussion or discourse, qualitative research is difficult to define clearly. It has no theory or paradigm that is distinctly or inherently its own. As Part II of this *Handbook* reveals, multiple theoretical paradigms claim use of qualitative research methods and strategies, from feminist theory, critical race theory, postcolonial theory, and queer theory to phenomenology, poststructuralism, and agential realism. Qualitative research is used in many separate disciplines, as we will discuss below. It does not belong to a single discipline.

Nor does qualitative research have a distinct set of methods or practices that are entirely its own. Qualitative researchers use semiotics, narrative, content, discourse, archival, and phonemic analysis—even statistics, tables, graphs, and numbers. They also draw on and use the approaches, methods, and techniques of ethnomethodology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, feminism, rhizomatics, deconstructionism, ethnographies, interviews, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, survey research, and participant observation, among others. No specific method or practice is privileged over another; each method bears the traces of its own disciplinary history.

The many histories that surround each method or research strategy reveal how multiple uses and meanings are brought to each practice. Textual analyses in literary studies, for example, often treat texts as self-contained systems. However, a critical race or feminist perspective reads a text in terms of its location within a historical moment marked by a particular gender, race, or class ideology. The use of ethnography in cultural studies would bring a set of understandings from feminism, postmodernism, and poststructuralism to the project. These understandings would not be shared by mainstream postpositivist sociologists. Similarly, postpositivist and poststructural historians bring different understandings and uses to the methods and findings of historical research. These tensions and contradictions are evident in many of the chapters in this *Handbook*.

These separate and multiple uses and meanings of the methods of qualitative research make it difficult to agree on any essential definition of the field, for it is never just one thing. Still, a definition must be offered. We borrow from and paraphrase Nelson et al.'s (1992, p. 4) attempt to define cultural studies:

Qualitative research/inquiry is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counterdisciplinary field. It crosscuts the humanities, as well as the social and the physical sciences. Qualitative research is many things at the same time. It is multiparadigmatic in focus. Its practitioners are sensitive to the value of the multimethod approach. They are committed to the naturalistic perspective and to the interpretive understanding of human experience. At the same time, the field is inherently political and shaped by multiple ethical and political positions.

Qualitative research/inquiry embraces two tensions at the same time. On the one hand, it is drawn to a broad, interpretive, postexperimental, postmodern, feminist, and critical sensibility. On the other hand, it is drawn to more narrowly defined positivist, postpositivist, humanistic, and naturalistic conceptions of human experience and its analysis. Furthermore, these tensions can be combined in the same project, bringing both postmodern and naturalistic, or both critical and humanistic, perspectives to bear, often in conflict with one another.

This rather awkward statement means that qualitative research is a set of complex interpretive practices. As a constantly shifting historical formation, it embraces tensions and contradictions, including disputes over its methods and the forms its findings and interpretations take. The field sprawls between and crosscuts all of the human disciplines, even including, in some cases, the physical sciences. Its practitioners are variously committed to modern, postmodern, and postexperimental sensibilities and the approaches to social research that these sensibilities imply.

## POLITICS AND REEMERGENT SCIENTISM

As we discussed earlier, politics animates some of the discussions over the institutional legitimation of qualitative research. The reemergent scientism inaugurated by the aforementioned Reading Excellence Act of 1999 and No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 created a hostile political environment for qualitative research, one that privileged a positivist, evidence-based epistemology. Researchers were encouraged to employ “rigorous, systematic, and objective methodology to obtain reliable and valid knowledge” (Ryan & Hood, 2004, p. 80). The preferred methodology had well-defined causal models using independent and dependent variables. Causal models were examined in the context of randomized controlled experiments, which allow replication and generalization (Ryan & Hood, 2004, p. 81).

Under this framework, qualitative research necessarily becomes suspect. There are no well-defined variables or causal models. Observations and measurements are not based on random assignment to experimental groups. Hard evidence is not generated by these methods. At best, case study, interview, and ethnographic methods offer descriptive materials that can be tested with experimental methods. The epistemologies of critical race, queer, postcolonial, feminist, and postmodern theories are rendered useless, relegated at best to the category of scholarship, not science (Ryan & Hood, 2004, p. 81; St. Pierre & Roulston, 2006, p. 132).

Critics of the SBR movement argued that it endorsed a narrow view of science, celebrated a “neoclassical experimentalism that is a throwback to the Campbell-Stanley era and its dogmatic adherence to an exclusive reliance on quantitative methods” (Howe, 2004, p. 42). Neoclassical experimentalists extolled evidence-based “medical research as the model for educational research, particularly the random clinical trial” (Howe, 2004, p. 48). But the random clinical trial—dispensing a pill—is quite unlike “dispensing a curriculum” (Howe, 2004, p. 48), nor can the “effects” of the educational experiment be easily measured, unlike a “10-point reduction in diastolic blood pressure” (Howe, 2004, p. 48).

The SBR movement created a second-class place for qualitative methods in mixed-methods experimental designs (Howe, 2004, p. 49), for the call for mixed methods presumes a methodological hierarchy—one with quantitative methods at the top and qualitative methods relegated to “a largely auxiliary role in pursuit of the *technocratic* aim of accumulating knowledge of ‘what works’” (Howe, 2004, pp. 53–54). The traditional mixed-methods movement took qualitative methods out of their natural home, which is within the critical interpretive framework (Howe, 2004, p. 54). It divided inquiry into dichotomous categories, exploration versus confirmation. Qualitative work was assigned to the first category, quantitative research to the second (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2003, p. 15). Like the classic experimental model, this movement excluded stakeholders from dialogue and active participation in the research process. Doing so weakened its democratic and dialogical dimensions and decreased the likelihood that previously silenced voices would be heard (Howe, 2004, pp. 56–57).

## THE PRAGMATIC CRITICISMS OF ANTIFOUNDATIONALISM

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Within this same time period, Seale et al. (2004) contested what they regarded as the excesses of an antimethodological, “anything goes,” romantic postmodernism of the kind associated with the poststructural, interpretive project. They asserted that too often, the approach produced “low quality qualitative research and research results that are quite stereotypical and close to common sense” (p. 2). In contrast they proposed a practice-based, pragmatic approach that placed research practice at the center. Research of this kind involves an engagement “with a variety of things and people: research materials . . . social theories, philosophical debates, values, methods, tests . . . research participants” (p. 2).<sup>17</sup> Their situated methodology rejects the antifoundational claim that there are only partial truths, that the dividing line between fact and fiction has broken down (Seale et al., 2004, p. 3; for parallel criticism, see Adler & Adler, 2008; Atkinson & Delamont, 2006; Hammersly, 2008). They believe that this dividing line has not collapsed and that we should not accept stories if they do not accord with the best available facts (p. 6). Oddly, these pragmatic procedural arguments reproduce a variant of the evidence-based model and its criticisms of poststructural performative sensibilities. They can be used to provide political support for the methodological marginalization of many of the positions advanced in this *Handbook*. In any event, we know few—if any—antimethodological, “anything goes” postmodernists.

This complex political terrain defines the many traditions and strands of qualitative research: the British and its presence in other national contexts; the American pragmatic, naturalistic, and interpretive traditions in sociology, anthropology, communications, and education; the German and French phenomenological, hermeneutic, semiotic, Marxist, structural, and poststructural perspectives; feminist, queer, African American, Latino, critical disability studies; and studies of Indigenous cultures. The politics of qualitative research create a tension that informs each of the above traditions. This tension itself is constantly being reexamined and interrogated, as qualitative research confronts a changing historical world, new intellectual positions, and its own institutional and academic conditions.

In the meantime, battles between the SBR (quantitative) and anti-SBR (qualitative) camps continue. As Flick (2002) summarizes,

The quantitative approach has been used for purposes of isolating “causes and effects . . . operationalizing theoretical relations . . . [and] measuring and . . . quantifying phenomena . . . allowing the generalization of findings” (p. 3). But today, doubt is cast on such projects. Rapid social change and the resulting diversification of life worlds are increasingly confronting social researchers with new social contexts and perspectives . . . traditional deductive methodologies . . . are failing . . . thus research is increasingly forced to make use of inductive strategies instead of starting from theories and testing them . . . knowledge and practice are studied as local knowledge and practice. (p. 2)

## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AS PROCESS

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Three interconnected, generic activities define the qualitative research process. They go by a variety of different labels, including ethics, paradigmatic controversies, theory, method, and analysis, or ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Behind these terms stand the personal biography of the researcher, who speaks from a particular class, gendered, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective. The gendered, multiculturally situated researcher—indeed all

inquirers—approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (ethics, theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology), which are then examined (methodology, analysis) in specific ways. That is, empirical materials bearing on the question are collected/generated/constructed and then analyzed and written about. Every researcher speaks from within a distinct interpretive community, which configures, in its own unique way, the multicultural, gendered components of the research act.

In this *Handbook*, we treat these generic activities under four headings or phases: philosophies of inquiry, practices of inquiry, political considerations and concerns, and into future. Behind and within each of these phases stands the biographically situated researcher. This individual enters the research process from inside an interpretive community. This community has its own historical research traditions, which constitute a distinct point of view. This perspective leads the researcher to adopt particular views of the “Other” who is studied. At the same time, the politics and the ethics of research must also be considered, for these concerns permeate every phase of the research process.

## THE “OTHER” AS RESEARCH SUBJECT

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From its turn-of-the-century birth in modern, interpretive form, qualitative research has been haunted by a double-faced ghost. In the first instance, qualitative researchers have assumed that qualified, competent observers could—with objectivity, clarity, and precision—report on their own observations of the social world, including the experiences of others. In the second, researchers have held to the belief in a real subject or real individual who is present in the world and able, in some form, to report on their experiences. So armed, researchers could blend their own observations with the self-reports provided by subjects through interviews, life story, personal experience, and case study documents.

These two beliefs have led qualitative researchers across disciplines to seek a method that would allow them to record accurately their own observations while also uncovering the meanings their subjects brought to their life experiences. This method would rely on the subjective verbal and written expressions of meaning given by the individuals, which are studied as windows into the inner life of the person. Ever since Dilthey (1900/1976) sought to distinguish between the natural and human sciences, this search for a method has led to a perennial focus in the human disciplines on qualitative, interpretive methods.

Recently, as noted above, this position and its beliefs have come under assault. Postqualitative, poststructural, and postmodern critics have contributed to the understanding that there is no clear window into the inner life of an individual. Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of—and between—the observer and the observed. Subjects, or individuals, are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions; all they can offer are accounts or stories about what they did and why. No single method can grasp the subtle variations in ongoing human experience. Consequently, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive methods, always seeking better ways to make more understandable the worlds of experience that have been studied.

Table 1.1 depicts the relationships we see among five phases that define the research process. Behind all but one of these phases stands the biographically situated researcher. These five levels of activity, or practice, work their way through the biography of the researcher. We take them up in brief order here, for each phase is more fully discussed in the transition sections between the various parts of this *Handbook*.

**TABLE 1.1 ■ The Research Matrix****Part I: Locating the Field**

Qualitative Methods: Histories in the Social and Educational Research  
 Ethics and the Conceptualization of Practice in Qualitative Inquiry  
 Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions, and Emerging Confluences

**Part II: Philosophies of Inquiry**

Feminist Inquiry  
 Critical Race Theory  
 Intersectionality  
 Queer/Quare Theory  
 Critical Disability Research  
 Phenomenology  
 Indigenous Methodologies  
 Postcolonial and Decolonized Knowing  
 Poststructural Engagements  
 Agential Realism, Diffraction, and Intra-Action

**Part III: Practices of Inquiry**

Interviewing  
 Observation and Surveillance  
 Ethnographic Futures  
 Situational Analysis after the Interpretive Turn  
 Thematic Analysis  
 Qualitative Social Media Methods  
 Autoethnography  
 Spaces of Performance  
 The Arts as Research  
 Communicative Methodology  
 Collaborative Inquiry From the Borderlands

**Part IV: Political Considerations and Concerns**

Evidence, Criteria, Policy, and Politics  
 Politics of Evidence  
 Qualitative Inquiry and Public Health Science  
 Co-Production and the Politics of Impact  
 Qualitative Inquiry, Academic Freedom, and Technologies of Governance

**Part V: Into the Future**

Qualitative Researchers in the Neoliberal Academy  
 Publishing and Reviewing Qualitative Research  
 Multiple, Transformative, and/or Posthuman Futures

**PART I: LOCATING THE FIELD**

Our remarks above indicate the depth and complexity of the traditional and applied qualitative research perspectives into which a socially situated researcher enters. These traditions locate the researcher in history, simultaneously guiding and constraining work that will be done in any specific study. This field has been constantly characterized by diversity and conflict, and these are its most enduring traditions. As a carrier of this complex and contradictory history, the researcher must also confront the ethics and politics of research (see Cannella & Lincoln, Chapter 3, this *Handbook*; Christians, 2017). It is no longer possible for the human disciplines to research the native, the Indigenous other, in a spirit of value-free inquiry. Today, researchers struggle to develop situational and transsituational ethics that apply to all forms of the research act and its human-to-human relationships. We no longer have the option of deferring the decolonization project.

## PART II: PHILOSOPHIES OF INQUIRY

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All qualitative researchers are philosophers in that “universal sense in which all human beings . . . are guided by highly abstract principles” (Bateson, 1972, p. 320). These principles combine beliefs about *ontology* (What kind of being is the human being? What is the nature of reality?), *epistemology* (What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known?), and *methodology* (How do we know the world or gain knowledge of it?) (see Guba, 1990, p. 18; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 14–15; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, Chapter 4, this *Handbook*). These beliefs shape how the qualitative researcher sees the world and acts in it. The researcher is “bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises which—regardless of ultimate truth or falsity—become partially self-validating” (Bateson, 1972, p. 314).

The net that contains the researcher’s epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises may be termed a *paradigm* (Guba, 1990, p. 17) or interpretive framework—a “basic set of beliefs that guides action” (Guba, 1990, p. 17). All research is interpretive, guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied. Some beliefs may be taken for granted, invisible, or only assumed, whereas others are highly problematic and controversial. Each interpretive paradigm makes particular demands on the researcher, including the questions that are asked and the interpretations that are brought to them.

The philosophical underpinnings of various forms of inquiry examined in Part II work against or alongside (and some within) the positivist and postpositivist models. They all work within relativist ontologies (multiple constructed realities), interpretive epistemologies (the knower and known interact and shape one another), and interpretive, naturalistic methods. Table 1.2 presents these paradigms and their assumptions, including their criteria for evaluating research, and the typical form that an interpretive or theoretical statement assumes in the paradigm. Each form of inquiry is explored in considerable detail in Chapters 5 through 14 of this *Handbook*.<sup>18</sup>

The *constructivist paradigm* assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures. Terms like *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability* replace the usual positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity. Feminist, postcolonial, poststructural, Indigenous, ethnic, queer theory, and disability models privilege a materialist-realist ontology; that is, the real world makes a material difference in terms of race, class, and gender. Subjectivist epistemologies and naturalistic methodologies (usually ethnographies) are also employed. Empirical materials and theoretical arguments are evaluated in terms of their emancipatory implications. Criteria from gender and racial communities may be applied (emotionality and feeling, caring, personal accountability, dialogue).

Poststructural feminist theories emphasize problems with the social text, its logic, and its inability to ever represent the world of lived experience fully (see Davies, Chapter 5, this *Handbook*; Olesen, 2017). Positivist and postpositivist criteria of evaluation are replaced by other terms, including the reflexive, multivoiced text, which is grounded in the experiences of oppressed people. Cultural studies and queer theory paradigms are multifocused, with many different strands drawing from Marxism, feminism, and the postmodern sensibility. There is a tension between humanistic interpretive studies, which stress lived experiences (meaning), and a more structural interpretive studies project (semiotics), which stresses the structural and material determinants and effects (race, class, gender) of experience. Of course, there are two sides to every coin; both sides are needed and are indeed critical. The cultural studies and queer theory paradigms use methods strategically, that is, as resources for understanding and for producing

**TABLE 1.2 ■ Interpretive Paradigms**

<i>Paradigm/ Theory</i>	<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Form of Theory</i>	<i>Type of Narration</i>
Positivist/ postpositivist	Internal, external validity	Logical-deductive, grounded	Scientific report
Constructivist Phenomenology	Trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, confirmability	Substantive-formal, standpoint	Interpretive case studies, ethnographic fiction
Feminist	Afrocentric, lived experience, dialogue, caring, accountability, race, class, gender, reflexivity, praxis, emotion, concrete grounding, embodied	Critical, standpoint	Essays, stories, experimental writing
Critical race; Indigenous	Lived experience, dialogue, caring, accountability, race, class, gender, the sacred	Standpoint, critical, historical	Essays, fables, dramas, stories, performances
Critical pedagogy	Emancipatory theory, dialogical, race, class, gender	Critical, historical, economic	Historical, narrative; critical race
Postcolonial Poststructural Diffraction	Cultural practices, praxis, social texts, subjectivities	Social criticism	Cultural theory-as- criticism; performance; matter; intra-action; apparatuses
Queer theory	Reflexivity, deconstruction	Social criticism, historical analysis	Theory-as- criticism, narrative, autobiography

resistances to local structures of domination. Such scholars may do close textual readings and discourse analysis of cultural texts (Chase, 2017), as well as local, online, reflexive, and critical ethnographies; open-ended interviewing; and participant observation. The focus is on how race, class, and gender are produced and enacted in historically specific situations.

Paradigm and personal history in hand, focused on a concrete empirical problem to examine, the researcher now moves to the next stage of the research process, namely, working with a specific strategy of inquiry.

### **PART III: PRACTICES OF INQUIRY**

Table 1.1 presents some of the major practices of inquiry a researcher may use. Part III begins with research design, which, broadly conceived, involves a clear focus on the research question, the purposes of the study, “what information most appropriately will answer specific research questions, and which strategies are most effective for obtaining it.” A research design describes

a flexible set of guidelines that connect theoretical paradigms, first, to strategies of inquiry and, second, to methods for collecting empirical material. A research design situates researchers in the empirical world and connects them to specific sites, people, groups, institutions, and bodies of relevant interpretive material, including documents and archives. A research design also specifies how the investigator will address the two critical issues of representation and legitimation, asking “how” not “why” questions.<sup>19</sup>

A practice (or strategy) of inquiry refers to a bundle of skills, assumptions, and practices that researchers employ as they move from their paradigm to the empirical world. Practices of inquiry put paradigms of interpretation into motion. At the same time, practices of inquiry also connect the researcher to specific methods of generating and analyzing empirical materials. For example, critical observation studies rely on interviewing, observing, and document analysis. Research strategies implement and anchor paradigms in specific empirical sites or in specific methodological practices, for example, making a case an object of study. These strategies include the case study, phenomenological and ethnomethodological techniques, the use of grounded theory, and biographical, autoethnographic, historical, and performance methods. Each of these strategies is connected to a complex literature; each has a separate history, exemplary works, and preferred ways for putting the strategy into motion. Within this *Handbook*, we feature specific chapters that take up interviewing, observation, thematic analysis, ethnography, situational analysis, social media methodologies, autoethnography, performance, art, communicative methods, multivocality, and collaborative forms of inquiry.

Within each of the above practices of inquiry, it becomes clear that qualitative inquiry is *endlessly creative* and interpretive. The researcher does not just leave the field with mountains of empirical materials and easily write up their findings. The writer creates narratives, braided compositions woven into and through field experiences. Qualitative interpretations are constructed. The researcher often creates a field text consisting of fieldnotes and documents from the field, what Sanjek (1992, p. 386) calls “indexing” and Plath (1990, p. 374) calls “filework.” The writer-as-interpreter moves from this text to an ethno-text, a research text: notes, stories, and interpretations based on the field text. This text is then re-created as a working interpretive document. Finally, the writer produces the public text that comes to the reader. This final tale from the field may assume several forms: ethnodrama, performance confessional, realist, impressionistic, critical, formal, literary, analytic, grounded theory, and so on (see Van Maanen, 1988). In the world of performance studies, this is called moving from body, to paper, to stage (see Spry, 2011; see also Saldaña, Chapter 22, this *Handbook*).

The interpretive practice of making sense of one’s findings is both artistic and political. Multiple criteria for evaluating qualitative research now exist, and those we emphasize stress the situated, relational, and textual structures of the ethnographic experience. There is no single interpretive truth. As argued earlier, there are multiple interpretive communities, each having its own criteria for evaluating an interpretation.

## PART IV: POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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Within Part IV, researchers consider and ask questions about how their research is located in and with the prevailing political considerations of the day. Torrance (Chapter 27, this *Handbook*), for example, demonstrates considerable controversy surrounds the issues of evidence, criteria, quality, and utility in educational and social research. Torrance asks an important question: Who



has the right to decide these matters? Along with Denzin (see Chapter 29, this *Handbook*) and Spooner (see Chapter 30, this *Handbook*) he asks, Who has the right to decide that counts as evidence? How are funding decisions made in the global audit culture? What is the political economy of critical social inquiry? Related questions of how qualitative research is and has been taken up with respect to public health policy and the politics of impact are asked by Greenhalgh and de-Graft Aikins (see Chapter 26, this *Handbook*) and Smith and McGannon (see Chapter 28, this *Handbook*), respectively.

## PART V: INTO THE FUTURE

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What comes next? What do new philosophical developments (such as those involving posthumanist and new materialist inquiry) and political turns (accelerated forms of neoliberalism; illiberal politics; etc.) herald for the interpretive practices of qualitative research?

We are in a new age where messy, uncertain multivoiced texts, cultural criticism, and new experimental works have become more common, as have more reflexive forms of fieldwork, analysis, and intertextual representation. In a complex space like this, pedagogy becomes critical—that is, how do we teach qualitative inquiry in an age of ontological, epistemological, and methodological uncertainty? In the intervening years since the fifth edition of the *Handbook*, many have taken the onto-epistemological turn—but where do we go after we have taken this turn? What does this turn mean for public scholarship, for public engagement? If the center no longer holds, then what will become the new center?

The role of the researcher in this space also becomes an uncertain one, as Cheek (Chapter 31, this *Handbook*) attests as she writes about academic survival in a variety of iterations. Allen (Chapter 32, this *Handbook*), as well, considers the stakes of the future as it relates to publishing qualitative research (and the politics of publishing more generally). Koro and Cannella (Chapter 33, this *Handbook*) look at the multiple, transformative posthuman futures that pull us forward—leading us to look at multiple futures for the field.

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And so, we have come full circle. Returning to our lattice metaphor, the chapters that make up this *Handbook* take the researcher back and forth through every phase of the research act. Like good lattice-work, the chapters provide for multidirectional pathways, coming and going between and across moments, formations, and interpretive communities. Each chapter examines the relevant histories, controversies, and current practices that are associated with each paradigm, strategy, and method. Each chapter also offers projections for the future, where a specific paradigm, strategy, or method might be 10 years from now, deep into the third decade of this now not so new century.

In reading this *Handbook*, it is important to remember that the field of qualitative research is defined by a series of tensions, contradictions, and hesitations. This tension works back and forth between and among (1) the broad, doubting, postmodern sensibility; (2) the more certain, more traditional positivist, postpositivist, and naturalistic conceptions of this project; and (3) an increasingly conservative, neoliberal global environment. All of the chapters that follow are caught in and articulate these tensions. There has never been a greater need for a handbook that can bring societies back together in troubled times. We are confident that a new generation of qualitative researchers will take up this challenge.

## NOTES

1. A paradigm is a basic set of beliefs that guide action (Guba, 1990, p. 17). A paradigm encompasses four terms: *ethics, epistemology, ontology, and methodology*.
2. But see Smith (2018) for a discussion of naturalistic versus statistical-probabilistic generalizability.
3. This section is partially informed by the work of Clark et al. (2015, pp. 37–43).
4. Portions of this section are drawn from Denzin (2010).
5. Two theses structured the paradigm argument between qualitative and quantitative methods. The incompatibility thesis argued that the methods could not be combined because of fundamental differences in their paradigm assumptions (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2003, pp. 14–15). The incommensurability thesis said the two paradigms were in fundamental contradiction with one another.
6. They contend that our second moment, the golden age (1950–1970), was marked by the debunking of positivism, the emergence of postpositivism, and the development of designs that used mixed quantitative and qualitative methods. Full-scale conflict developed throughout the 1970 to 1990 period, the time of the first “paradigm war.” Jameson (1991, pp. 3–4) reminds us that any periodization hypothesis is always suspect, even ones that reject linear, stage-like models. It is never clear to what reality a stage refers. What divides one stage from another is always debatable. Our moments are meant to mark discernible shifts in style, genre, epistemology, ethics politics, and aesthetics.
7. Qualitative research has separate and distinguished histories in education, social work, communications, psychology, history, organizational studies, medical science, anthropology, and sociology, and these disciplines have had their own paradigm battles.
8. For example, SAGE began publishing journals *Qualitative Health Research* and *Qualitative Inquiry* in 1991 and 1995, respectively; journals such as *Ethnography* (in 2000), *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* (in 2001), *Qualitative Research* (first published in 2001), *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* (in 2007), and *International Review of Qualitative Research* (2009) would later follow.
9. *JMMR*'s 2020 Impact Factor of 5.267 ranks it 4/110 in this category, illustrating the extent to which it has maintained its primacy within the journal ranking metrics. By comparison, the journal *Qualitative Inquiry* (edited by Denzin, Lincoln, and Giardina) is the highest-ranked qualitative research journal, with a 2020 Impact Factor of 4.716, ranking it 7/110 in the same category as *JMMR*.
10. Symonds and Gorard (2008) went so far as to call for the death of mixed methods, hoping that this death would lead to the rebirth of research as a craft (p. 17). This did not occur. Quite the opposite: Mixed-methods research has flourished in the decade-plus since they made this pronouncement. Flick (2018), however, was more measured in his assessment of the future of mixed methods:  
  
The fashion and attraction of mixed-methods will come to an end, once funders, researchers, publishers and finally its protagonists realize that it is less a solution to all kinds of problems but just another methodological approach with limits and weaknesses. One reason for such an insight can be the overrating of such a concept—who is sitting in review committees in medical sciences for example is confronted with a growing number of proposals which include qualitative research as part of a mixed methods approach although the knowledge about this kind of research is very superficial. In the long run, this may lead to the insight that, if combinations of methods are necessary, this should be done on more solid grounds such as a developed concept of triangulation could provide. That would require that the concept of triangulation is further developed more offensively and propagated.
11. Methodolatry is “a preoccupation with selecting and defending methods to the exclusion of the actual substance of the story being told” (Janessick, 1994, p. 215).

12. Mazzei's (2013) main point is that rethinking the interview in such differentiated ways "requires different conceptions of human agency" (p. 733); from a humanist perspective, "agency is an innate characteristic of the essentialist, intentional free subject (p. 733); from the post-structural perspective, agency "seems to lie in the subject's ability to decode and record its identity within discursive formations and cultural practices" (p. 733)—a politics of language and representation at work. But from the posthumanist perspective, "agency is distributed in a way that avoids hanging on to the vestiges of a knowing humanist subject that lingers in some poststructural analysis. . . . [such that] intentionality is not attributable to humans" (p. 733) but rather is, after Karen Barad (2007), "understood as attributable to a complex network of human and nonhuman agents, including historically specific sets of material conditions that exceed the traditional notion of the individual" (p. 23; also cited in Mazzei, 2013, p. 734).
13. Erickson's Chapter 2 of this *Handbook* charts many key features of this painful history. He notes with some irony that qualitative research in sociology and anthropology was born out of concern to understand the "exotic," often dark-skinned "Other." Of course, there were colonialists long before there were anthropologists and ethnographers. Nonetheless, there would be no colonial—and, now, no neocolonial—history, were it not for this investigative mentality that turned the dark-skinned Other into the object of the ethnographer's gaze. From the very beginning, qualitative research was implicated in a racist project (see Collins & Cannella, 2021).
14. And others, such as Teddlie and Tashakkori (2011), have modified our historical periods to fit their historical analysis of the major moments in the emergence of mixed methods in the last century.
15. This paragraph is drawn from Giardina (2017).
16. In practical terms, following St. Pierre (2015), this would be the equivalent to answering a question about one's research project by invoking method, such as "I'm doing a case study" and "I'm doing an interview study," rather than invoking theoretical engagement or philosophical inquiry into a given topic or phenomenon.
17. To be fair, this approach is quite close to our own, especially our view of the bricoleur and bricolage. However, their argument dishonestly frames the postmodern/poststructural project.
18. The positivist and postpositivist paradigms were discussed above. They work from within a realist and critical realist ontology and objective epistemologies, and they rely on experimental, quasi-experimental, survey, and rigorously defined qualitative methodologies.
19. The practice of research design is a complex one in and of itself. Flick's (2022) *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Design* is a two-volume set covering 10 parts, including design for specific kinds of data, design for online and multimodal research, design for specific groups and areas, design for different disciplinary fields, and design for forms of impact.

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