

# Qualitative Research in Counseling Psychology: A Primer on Research Paradigms and Philosophy of Science

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This article presents an overview of philosophy of science and research paradigms. The philosophy of science parameters of ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetorical structure, and methodology are discussed across the research paradigms of positivism, postpositivism, constructivism-interpretivism, and the critical-ideological perspective. Counseling researchers are urged to locate their inquiry approaches within identifiable research paradigms, and examples of “locating” 2 popular inquiry approaches—consensual qualitative research and grounded theory—are provided. Examples of how counseling research would proceed from varying paradigms are explored, and a call is made for expanding the training students receive in philosophy of science and qualitative approaches to inquiry.

In my view, North American psychology generally, and counseling psychology specifically, is in the midst of a gradual paradigm shift from a primary reliance on quantitative methods to a more balanced reliance on quantitative and qualitative methods. Writing from Canada, O'Neill (2002) noted that a paradigm shift is underway in which “qualitative research may (and perhaps should) replace the hegemony of quantitative methods in psychology” (p. 193). Though writing to stir debate, O'Neill was ultimately calling for more balance of qualitative and quantitative methods in psychological research. Focusing on the United States, Ponterotto (2002) noted that “the strong affinity for qualitative approaches held by many counseling students (and professionals) will lead to a radical transformation and paradigm shift in the research training components of counseling psychology programs” (p. 395). Supporting the conceptual writing just cited, a Delphi poll of counseling psychology training directors in the United States identified attention to “qualitative sophistication” and “methodological diversity and triangulation” as the top two trends for research development in the field over the next decade (Neimeyer & Diamond, 2001, p. 57).

This special issue of the *Journal of Counseling Psychology (JCP)* on qualitative approaches (Haverkamp, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2005) serves as an invitation for counseling psychologists to consider the place of qualitative research methods in the field, generally, and in their own research programs and training environments, specifically. I invite readers to consider the following questions as they digest this special *JCP* issue: (a) What role should qualitative research play in advancing counseling psychology as a science? (b) What is my understanding of qualitative inquiry approaches, and what are my biases regarding the rigor and

utility of these approaches? (c) How could the variety of qualitative approaches reviewed in this issue and elsewhere (e.g., Camic, Rhodes, & Yardley, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a) enhance my own development as a researcher, clinician, and educator? and (d) What role should I play in advocating for increased qualitative research in my clinic, counseling center, or academic department?

Qualitative researchers often acknowledge and “bracket” their prior investigative observations and current expectations at the outset of their research studies (Creswell, 1998). Thus, I begin this article by explicitly stating my recent observations and current perceptions:

1. Psychology generally, and counseling psychology specifically, has been dominated by positivist and postpositivist research paradigms and associated quantitative methods. Such a narrow paradigmatic focus has limited the profession's ability to advance the field in significant ways. As counseling psychology broadens its paradigmatic base and extends its scope of research methods to include qualitative approaches, it will advance rapidly as a scientific field.

There is little question that North American psychology generally, and counseling psychology specifically, has been dominated by quantitative research methods anchored in positivist and post-positivist research paradigms (Camic et al., 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b; McLeod, 2001; Morrow & Smith, 2000; Rennie, 2002). This dominance is reflected in available research coursework (Ponterotto, 2005), dissertations conducted (Keeley, Shemberg, & Zaynor, 1988; Ponterotto, 2005), and research published (Rennie, Watson, & Monteiro, 2002). Of recent interest is the century-long content analysis (1900–1999) conducted by Rennie et al. (2002). These authors entered five search terms—*qualitative research*, *grounded theory*, *discourse analysis*, *phenomenological psychology*, and *empirical phenomenology*—into the PsycINFO database to track the growth of these methods over the 20th century. The authors found that, although there was a slight increase in the use of these methodologies in recent decades, even during the decade of the 1990s, the peak years in the survey, the search uncovered less than one half of 1% of submitted term “hits.”

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Though the field of counseling psychology has certainly advanced and developed in significant ways in recent decades (see Heppner, Casas, Carter, & Stone, 2000), I believe our discipline will reach significant new heights through the incorporation of postmodern perspectives and associated qualitative research methods (Hansen, 2004). Gergen (2001), speaking to psychology generally, highlighted that though postmodern perspectives have been discussed for some time in neighboring social sciences, psychology has been slow to enter this discussion. In fact, Gergen (2001, p. 803) was "concerned that the conception of psychological science commonly shared within the discipline is historically frozen and is endangered by its isolation from the major intellectual and global transformations of the past half century." Richardson (1996) and Marecek, Fine, and Kidder (2001) echoed sentiments similar to those of Gergen as they highlighted American psychology's slow embrace of qualitative approaches relative to other social sciences in the United States and relative to psychology research internationally.

I expect that most readers of *JCP* would agree with Gergen's (2001) assertion that by broadening our intellectual and philosophical perspectives and research methodologies, the profession will grow in terms of both professional knowledge (see McLeod, 2001) and societal impact (see Hill, in press). Counseling psychologists (e.g., Hoshmand, 1989; Howard, 2003; Polkinghorne, 1988) have been advocating for decades for the increased incorporation of postmodern perspectives and associated qualitative methods in psychological research.

2. At present, there is a strong call to enhance the level of qualitative research training in counseling psychology, though our progress is slow in bolstering the level of such training that students and scholars receive.

This special issue of *JCP* on qualitative methods is reflective of the developing call for increased attention to and incorporation of qualitative research into the profession. There are likely over a hundred recent books (e.g., Camic et al., 2003; McLeod, 2001), book chapters (Morrow & Smith, 2000), journal editorials (e.g., Giles, Gough, & Packer, 2004; Kline, 2003), and special journal issues (e.g., Crawford & Kimmel, 1999; Rennie, 2002) advocating for more balance in qualitative versus quantitative inquiry methods. However, modification in training of psychologists is not keeping pace with these calls. For example, a recent North American survey (Ponterotto, 2005) of directors of counseling psychology programs (79% response rate) revealed that only 10% of programs required a qualitative research course of doctoral students, and the median percentage of qualitative doctoral dissertations completed in an average year across programs was only 10%.

3. Increasing numbers of quantitatively trained counseling psychologists are beginning to adopt qualitative research methods into their research programs, but some are doing so without a firm grasp of the philosophical anchors undergirding many approaches to qualitative inquiry. It is important that researchers understand well the philosophy of science parameters anchoring their work.

Recently, I (Ponterotto, 2002, in press; Ponterotto & Grieger, 1999) studied anecdotally the published reflections of counseling psychologists who were initially trained in the postpositivist paradigm and associated quantitative methods and who adopted over time a qualitative emphasis in their research programs. I noted that developing expertise in various qualitative approaches and philosophy of science is a process that takes time, often a number of

years of study. My current perception, however, is that some psychologists begin conducting and supervising qualitative research without a firm understanding of philosophy of science parameters undergirding different research paradigms. My concern is that though counseling psychologists may express verbal support and enthusiasm for qualitative methods, their research lens is still heavily influenced by their postpositivist socialization. The risk is that these researchers may be unknowingly "postpositivizing" constructivist qualitative methods, which is akin to forcing a round peg into a square hole.

Examples of "postpositivizing" may include the use of semi-structured interviews that are literature driven, detailed, and standard from participant to participant; the selection of the complete sample before the study rather than the incorporation of theoretical sampling; the establishment of theme categories before the study and the attempt to code interview data into these categories; or the calculation of the number of participants who are represented in each theme. These practices all represent a postpositivist research worldview, and if imposed on a researcher seeking to carry out a constructivist study, the nature of the intended study will be altered significantly. For more extensive discussion and elaboration of these issues, I refer the reader to multiple contributions within edited volumes by Camic et al. (2003) and Rennie (2002).

My opinion is that strong researchers, whether hailing from postpositivism and quantitative research traditions or from constructivism-interpretivism and associated qualitative traditions, must understand fully the philosophy of science parameters undergirding their research worldview and day-to-day scholarly work. A major goal I have for this introductory article is to provide readers with a basic foundation in philosophy of science.

## Contextual Definitions

It is important to briefly define the following terms that I and others use throughout this *JCP* special issue: *philosophy of science*, *paradigm*, *idiographic* versus *nomothetic* perspectives, *etic* versus *emic* distinctions, *quantitative methods*, and *qualitative methods*.

### *Philosophy of Science*

For the purpose of this article I define *science* broadly as the systematic quest for knowledge. *Philosophy of science* refers to the conceptual roots undergirding the quest for knowledge. Incorporated within philosophy of science are beliefs or assumptions regarding ontology (the nature of reality and being), epistemology (the study of knowledge, the acquisition of knowledge, and the relationship between the knower [research participant] and would-be knower [the researcher]), axiology (the role and place of values in the research process), rhetorical structure (the language and presentation of the research), and methodology (the process and procedures of research; see Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ponterotto, 2002).

### *Paradigm*

A *paradigm* can be defined as a "set of interrelated assumptions about the social world which provides a philosophical and conceptual framework for the organized study of that world" (Filstead,

1979, p. 34). The paradigm selected guides the researcher in philosophical assumptions about the research and in the selection of tools, instruments, participants, and methods used in the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b).

### *Idiographic and Nomothetic Perspectives*

Two terms heard often in research and testing, and that help to define the focus of inquiry, are *idiographic* and *nomothetic*. *Idiographic* stems from the Greek *idios*, which means applying to the individual; and *nomothetic* has semantic origins in the Greek *nomos*, which refers to application to people generally, as in general patterns or universal statements or laws (Hood & Johnson, 1997). Idiographic research or assessment focuses on understanding the individual as a unique, complex entity. Writing that is idiographic is very descriptive and detailed in presentation (e.g., a biography or case study). In marked contrast, nomothetic research and assessment focuses on uncovering general patterns of behavior that have a normative base. Nomothetic research has a primary goal of prediction and explanation of phenomena rather than individual in-depth understanding. Nomothetic writing is most often objective and impersonal with a focus on generalizable findings (e.g., a randomized experiment).

### *Etic–Emic Distinction*

Stemming from work in communication, *etic* and *emic* are terms used frequently in the multicultural counseling field. The origins of *etic* are from *phonetic* (language general), and *emic* from *phonemic* (language specific), terms addressing rules of language (Pedersen, 1999). *Etic* refers to universal laws and behaviors that transcend nations and cultures and apply to all humans. For example, the concept that people are biological organisms is an *etic* concept in that we all need to eat, drink, and sleep to survive. *Emic* refers to constructs or behaviors that are unique to an individual, sociocultural context that are not generalizable. For example, the Jewish High Holy Days or the Christian Easter celebration are not universally acknowledged, as these concepts are religion specific.

### *Quantitative Methods*

Generally speaking, quantitative methods focus on the strict quantification of observations (data) and on careful control of empirical variables. Quantitative research often incorporates large-scale sampling and the use of statistical procedures to examine group means and variances (Ponterotto & Grieger, 1999). Quantitative studies stress the measurement and analysis of causal or correlational relationships between variables (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b).

### *Qualitative Methods*

*Qualitative methods* refer to a broad class of empirical procedures designed to describe and interpret the experiences of research participants in a context-specific setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b). Qualitative findings are generally presented in everyday language and often incorporate participants' own words to describe a psychological event, experience, or phenomenon (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). More specific defining characteristics of qualitative methods are dependent on the particular research paradigm

undergirding a chosen inquiry approach (which are discussed throughout this article). Both qualitative and quantitative approaches are empirical methods in that they involve the collection, analysis, and interpretation of observations or data.

## Research Paradigms

As highlighted earlier, a research paradigm sets the context for an investigator's study. There are numerous paradigms used to guide research, and authors incorporate different paradigmatic schemas to conceptualize and classify their research (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b). Of the numerous classification schemes introduced in the literature, I find the schema of Guba and Lincoln (1994) to be the most concise and manageable, and I adapt it slightly in this article. The paradigms I review next are positivism, postpositivism, constructivism–interpretivism, and critical theory (with related ideological positions), which I label critical–ideological. I suggest that readers review various paradigmatic schemas and operate from the one that they find most interpretable and comprehensive.

### *Positivism*

*Positivism* is a form of philosophical realism adhering closely to the hypothetico–deductive method (Cacioppo, Semin, & Bernston, 2004; McGrath & Johnson, 2003; Sciarra, 1999). As all counseling psychology students are quickly taught, the scientific method involves systematic observation and description of phenomena contextualized within a model or theory, the presentation of hypotheses, the execution of tightly controlled experimental study, the use of inferential statistics to test hypotheses, and, finally, the interpretation of the statistical results in light of the original theory (Cacioppo et al., 2004). Relying on the hypothetico–deductive method, positivism focuses on efforts to verify a priori hypotheses that are most often stated in quantitative propositions that can be converted into mathematical formulas expressing functional relationships (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; McGrath & Johnson, 2003). The primary goal of positivistic inquiry is an explanation that (ultimately) leads to prediction and control of phenomena.

Positivism is a function of the modernist era that is traced to the Enlightenment period of the 17th and 18th centuries. According to Gergen (2001), enlightenment thinkers (e.g., Descartes, 1637/1968; Locke, 1689/1956) moved away from the medieval (and Dark Age) focus on accepting, unquestioningly, the totalitarian force of royal or religious decree. Enlightenment brought with it the notions of the centrality of the individual, the world as objectively knowable, and the use of language (including numerical language) as the conveyor of truth (Gergen, 2001; see also Hansen, 2004; McGrath & Johnson, 2003).

As an organized branch of philosophy, positivism can be traced to the 19th century, with specific origins rooted in Mill's (1843/1906) *A System of Logic* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) summarize succinctly the basic assumptions inherent in Mill's perspective: (a) that social and natural sciences should have the same goals—the discovery of laws that lead to explanation and prediction, (b) that social and natural sciences should incorporate the same methodology (i.e., the hypothetico–deductive method), (c) that concepts should be defined by empirical categories, (d) that there is uniformity of nature in time and

space (speaking to the existence of a true, identifiable reality), (e) that laws of nature be derived from data, and (g) that large samples suppress idiosyncrasies in data and reveal general causes or the ultimate laws of nature (speaking to an etic and nomothetic preference over an emic and idiographic perspective).

Mill (1843/1906) believed that if social scientists expended more effort in emulating their natural (“hard”) science cousins, then rapid maturation of these fields could evolve. Positivism has been the dominant force in science (including psychology) for over 150 years. In fact, it is often described as the “received view” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Keeley et al., 1988), given its reception and adoption by the social sciences.

### Postpositivism

Postpositivism arose out of dissatisfaction with some aspects of the positivist stance. Whereas positivists accept an objective, apprehensible reality, postpositivists acknowledge an objective reality that is only imperfectly apprehendable (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). This position holds that human intellectual mechanisms are flawed and that life’s phenomena are basically intractable, and therefore, one can never fully capture a “true” reality. A key distinction between the positivist and postpositivist views is that the former stresses “theory verification” and the latter “theory falsification” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 107). Highlighting the work of the modern philosopher Popper (1968), Guba and Lincoln (1994) present an interesting illustration to explain the verification–falsification distinction: “Whereas a million white swans can never establish, with complete confidence, the proposition that all swans are white, one black swan can completely falsify it” (p. 107).

Despite some important differences between the positivist and postpositivist paradigms, the two perspectives share much in common (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Ponterotto, 2002). A goal for both is an explanation that leads to prediction and control of phenomena. Both perspectives emphasize cause–effect linkages of phenomena that can be studied, identified, and generalized, and both paradigms proffer an objective, detached researcher role. Furthermore, both paradigms operate from both a nomothetic and etic perspective. Positivism and postpositivism serve as the primary foundation and anchor for quantitative research.

### Constructivism–Interpretivism

The constructivist (or interpretivist) paradigm can be perceived as an alternative to the “received view” or positivist paradigm. In marked contrast to positivism’s naïve realism (a single objective external reality), **constructivism adheres to a relativist position that assumes multiple, apprehendable, and equally valid realities** (Schwandt, 1994). Essentially, constructivists hold that reality is constructed in the mind of the individual, rather than it being an externally singular entity (Hansen, 2004). The constructivist position espouses a hermeneutical approach, which maintains that meaning is hidden and must be brought to the surface through deep reflection (see Schwandt, 2000; Sciarra, 1999). This reflection can be stimulated by the interactive researcher–participant dialogue. Thus a distinguishing characteristic of constructivism is the centrality of the interaction between the investigator and the object of investigation. Only through this interaction can deeper meaning be

uncovered. The researcher and her or his participants jointly create (co-construct) findings from their interactive dialogue and interpretation. The goals of constructivism–interpretivism are both idiographic and emic. Qualitative research and the seeds of constructivism–interpretivism can be traced back to Kant’s (1881/1966) *Critique of Pure Reason*. According to Hamilton (1994, p. 63), **Kant’s position was that “human perception derives not only from evidence of the senses but also from the mental apparatus that serves to organize the incoming sense impressions”** and that “human claims about nature cannot be independent of inside-the-head processes of the knowing subject.”

Kant’s work highlights a central tenet of constructivist thinking: **that you cannot partition out an objective reality from the person (research participant) who is experiencing, processing, and labeling the reality (Sciarra, 1999).** In other words, **reality is constructed by the actor (e.g., research participant).** This ontological distinction is critical to understanding the basic difference between positivism and postpositivism (and chiefly quantitative methods) and constructivism–interpretivism (chiefly qualitative methods).

Another significant figure in the development of constructivism was Dilthey (1894/1977). Influenced by Kantian theory, Dilthey rejected the Cartesian reductionistic and objective emphases. Dilthey made the important distinction between *Naturwissenschaft* (natural science) and *Geisteswissenschaft* (human science) to help distinguish the positivistic and constructivistic stances (see Hamilton, 1994; Herman, 1997; Schwandt, 2000). **The goal of *Naturwissenschaft* is scientific explanation (*Erklären*), whereas the goal of *Geisteswissenschaft* is understanding (*Verstehen*) of the “meaning” of social phenomena (Schwandt, 1994, 2000).**

**Proponents of constructivism–interpretivism emphasize the goal of understanding the “lived experiences” (*Erlebnis*) from the point of view of those who live it day to day (Schwandt, 1994, 2000).** Dilthey believed that every “lived experience” occurs within a historical social reality. He further believed that **these lived experiences may be outside the immediate awareness of the individual but could be brought to consciousness.** It is important to note that Dilthey was of the position that *Erlebnis* was an empirical concept that was amenable to human science (qualitative) research (Herman, 1997). Understandably, the constructivist–interpretivist paradigm provides the primary foundation and anchor for qualitative research methods.

### Critical–Ideological

Critical theory serves to disrupt and challenge the status quo (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994, 2000). The critical–ideological paradigm is one of emancipation and transformation, one in which the researcher’s proactive values are central to the task, purpose, and methods of research. The origins of critical theory are most often traced to the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt in the 1920s (Creswell, 1998). Pioneering critical theorists at the Frankfurt School included Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse. These scholars, influenced by the German philosophical tradition of Marx, Kant, Hegel, and Weber, were of the view that “injustice and subjugation shape the lived world” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 280).

Roughly a decade after the Frankfurt School was established, the Nazis controlled Germany, and Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse, being of Jewish background, fled to California. Accord-



ing to Kincheloe and McLaren (2000), these scholars “were shocked by American culture” and startled “by the contradictions between progressive American rhetoric of egalitarianism and the reality of racial and class discrimination” (p. 280).

In 1953, Horkheimer and Adorno returned to Frankfurt, whereas Marcuse remained in the United States and went on to be an influential philosophical force behind the 1960s student movement (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). Stimulated by Marcuse’s work, many academics who “came of age” in the 1960s began to focus on critical theory. **Basic to the critical theorist is the belief in a constructed lived experience that is mediated by power relations within social and historical contexts** (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). Equally central to critical theory is the emphasis on dialectical interaction leading to emancipation (from oppression) and a more egalitarian and democratic social order (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994; see also Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001, on participatory action research).

Kincheloe and McLaren (1994, 2000) caution us to interpret critical theory broadly, in that there is no single critical theory. These authors highlight that the Frankfurt theorists themselves never claimed to have developed a unified theory and that there are many criticalist schools of thought. Nonetheless, **there are commonalities among the variants of critical theory, and these transcendent aspects help to define this paradigm**. First and foremost, **a criticalist is a researcher who uses her or his work as a form of cultural or social criticism**. Second, **criticalist researchers in all disciplines accept certain basic assumptions, among which are the following**, extracted directly from Kincheloe and McLaren (1994):

**All thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constituted; [b] facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription; [c] language is central to the formation of subjectivity; [d] certain groups in society are privileged over others; [e] oppression has many faces and that focusing on one at the expense of others often elides the interconnections among them; and [f] mainstream research practices are generally implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression.** (pp. 139–140; see also Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001)

Like constructivists, **criticalists advocate a reality that is constructed within a social–historical context**. However, more so than constructivists, **criticalists conceptualize reality and events within power relations, and they use their research inquiry to help emancipate oppressed groups**. Criticalists emphasize a dialectic stance on the researcher–participant interaction that aims to **empower participants to work toward egalitarian and democratic change and transformation** (Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001). Denzin (1994) has noted that “An emancipatory principle drives such research, which is committed to engaging oppressed groups in collective, democratic theorizing about” their common and different perceptions of oppression and privilege (p. 509). The critical–ideological perspective is primarily **idiographic and emic**.

The reader can see the impact and influence of the researcher’s proactive values in critical theory, a characteristic that is in marked contrast to the positivist and postpositivist paradigms. **Feminist, critical race, and queer theory conceptualizations are examples of related ideological positions that I include under the rubric of critical theory** (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a, 2000b). The critical–

ideological paradigm (like constructivism–interpretivism) often **forms the conceptual base for qualitative multicultural research**.

## Research Paradigms and Philosophy of Science

In this section I examine the positions of the major paradigms with respect to the philosophical anchors of ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetorical structure, and methodology.

### Ontology

*Ontology* concerns the nature of reality and being. More specifically, ontology addresses the following question: What is the form and nature of reality, and what can be known about that reality? Positivists contend that there is but one true reality that is apprehendable, identifiable, and measurable (a position known as *naïve realism*). Postpositivists also accept a true reality, but they believe it can only be apprehended and measured imperfectly (a position known as *critical realism*).

Constructivists–interpretivists, on the other hand, believe there exist multiple, constructed realities (known as the *relativist* position), rather than a single true reality. Reality, according to the constructivist position, is subjective and influenced by the context of the situation, namely the individual’s experience and perceptions, the social environment, and the interaction between the individual and the researcher. Finally, critical theory acknowledges a reality shaped by ethnic, cultural, gender, social, and political values. Critical theorists focus on realities that are mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constituted.

Thus, for example, a positivist conducting a study on counseling process and outcome in cross-racial dyads may set up a tightly controlled experimental analog study, manipulating carefully only one variable (e.g., race of the counselor) while holding all other variables constant (e.g., exact counseling script). The researcher randomly assigns a large sample of prospective clients to one of the race conditions. The goal of the study is etic in that it attempts to identify one set of results (one true reality) that can be generalizable to a larger population. A postpositivist researcher may use semistructured, brief interviews of clients after the cross-cultural session and may use multiple raters in an attempt to identify a single approximal reality of collective client experiences, either through the use of interrater reliability or consensual agreement upon identified themes.

**By marked contrast, a constructivist–interpretivist researcher may interview only a handful of clients for longer periods of time and when analyzing the transcript data will not seek other researcher consensus on identified themes**. The point here is that there are multiple meanings of a phenomenon in the minds of people who experience it as well as multiple interpretations of the data (multiple realities); **the researcher neither attempts to unearth a single “truth” from the realities of participants nor tries to achieve outside verification of his or her analysis**. Thus, it is irrelevant whether a different researcher looking at the same typed interview transcripts arrives at different themes. Both may be correct, and the reader should judge the rigor of the study on the basis of its thick description (see Morrow, 2005, for establishing research rigor across paradigmatic bases). Finally, the critical–ideological researcher may use similar interviews but is working

under the assumption that the minority clients are not receiving adequate mental health access (a reality mediated by differential power), and he or she uses and presents the data in a form to pressure the mental health clinic to hire more bilingual or multi-culturally competent counselors.

### Epistemology

Epistemology is concerned with the relationship between the “knower” (the research participant) and the “would-be knower” (the researcher). Positivists emphasize dualism and objectivism. That is, the researcher and the research participant and topic are assumed to be independent of one another (dualism), and by following rigorous, standard procedures, the participant and topic can be studied by the researcher without bias (objectivism). Furthermore, positivists hold that the investigator can study her or his research participants without influencing them and vice versa. If values and biases of the researcher influence the study in any way, the study becomes flawed. Finally, replicated findings are considered “true” and enhance theory verification evidence. Postpositivists advocate a modified dualism/objectivism. This position acknowledges that the researcher may have some influence on that being researched, but objectivity and researcher–subject independence remain important guidelines for the research process.

Constructivists–interpretivists advocate a transactional and subjectivist stance that maintains that reality is socially constructed and, therefore, the dynamic interaction between researcher and participant is central to capturing and describing the “lived experience” (*Erlebnis*) of the participant. Similarly, in critical theory, the relationship between researcher and participant is transactional and subjective; the relationship is also dialectic in nature, with the goal of inciting transformation in the participants that leads to group empowerment and emancipation from oppression. More so than in the constructivist position, the research process in the critical theory framework is highly value mediated.

To a positivist or postpositivist, the close interpersonal interaction between researcher and participant characteristic of constructivist and critical theory approaches might be termed *enmeshed*—early positivist anthropologists termed this “going native”—and may be viewed as saturated with researcher bias. On the other hand, the laboratory-like conditions and the reductionistic approach to research central to positivism and postpositivism may be perceived by constructivists and criticalists as unable to capture, and possibly distorting, the complex lives of human beings.

Turning to another example, a positivist-leaning counseling psychologist working with migrant Mexican farm workers may set up an experimental study of stress management techniques and use research assistants (who may be blind to some aspects of the study) to conduct the study. The lead experimenter tries not to involve her- or himself with the participants for fear of creating demand characteristics. The relationship between the research and participants is objective and dualistic. Now let us turn to the postpositivist researcher who may use translated surveys, or brief semi-structured interviews, to study the stress patterns of the workers. If using a survey approach, the lead researcher may have little contact with the migrant workers (dualism), and if using interviews, she or he may use multiple interviewers following the same protocol, and the interviewers are cautioned not to get “too emotionally involved” in the interview process.

The constructivist–interpretivist psychologist working with the same farm workers is more likely to spend extensive amounts of time with the workers in the fields and will interview them in length in Spanish. An assumption here is that through intense interaction and dialogue, both the participant and the researcher will reach deeper insights (hermeneutical discovery) into the *Erlebnis* (lived experience) of stress conditions in the fields. In most cases, the researcher, as well as the participant, is changed in some way as a result of the dialogic interaction (Ponterotto, in press). The researcher will empathize and may identify with the participant in some way (see Sciarra, 1999). Finally, the criticalist–ideologist in the same context will work collaboratively with the farmers and use the interviews to help empower the farmers to seek better working and living conditions in the fields. The research goal in this instance is both dialogic (reaching deep insights through interaction) and dialectic (transformative).

### Axiology

Axiology concerns the role of researcher values in the scientific process. Positivists and postpositivists maintain that there is no place for values in the research process. Like a chemist in a sterile laboratory, the psychology researcher should remain emotionally detached from the investigative inquiry. One’s values, hopes, expectations, and feelings have no place in scientific inquiry. By using standardized, systematic investigative methods, the researcher eliminates or strictly controls any influence she or he might have on the participants or on the research process. Though positivist and postpositivist researchers carefully contain their value biases during an investigation, values are naturally reflected in the selection of a study topic. For example, a researcher’s decision to study poverty may reflect a sense of social commitment.

Constructivists–interpretivists maintain that the researcher’s values and lived experience (*Erlebnis*) cannot be divorced from the research process. The researcher should acknowledge, describe, and “bracket” his or her values, but not eliminate them. Keep in mind that the epistemology underlying a constructivist position requires close, prolonged interpersonal contact with the participants in order to facilitate their construction and expression of the “lived experience” being studied. Therefore, it is a fallacy to even think that one could eliminate value biases in such an interdependent researcher–participant interaction.

Criticalists take values a step further than constructivists in that they admittedly hope and expect their value biases to influence the research process and outcome. More specifically, because critical theory concerns itself with unequal distributions of power and the resultant oppression of subjugated groups, a preset goal of the research is to empower participants to transform the status quo and emancipate themselves from ongoing oppression. This is a central component of “liberation” thinkers generally (e.g., Freire, 1970) and of liberation counseling psychologists (e.g., Utsey, Bolden, & Brown, 2001) specifically.

For the positivist-oriented counseling psychologist researching the migrant farm workers, values are not relevant to the research process and must be deleted from the equation, so to speak. Thus, by using research assistants and by not having close personal contact with the participants, there is little chance of the lead researcher’s values biasing or confounding the study. The post-

positivist researcher tries to contain her or his biases as much as possible but realizes that they are present and may come into play in the study in one form or another. If the researcher is using interviews with farm workers, she or he may bracket research expectations by explicating them prior to the study. The researcher will also take care at the end of the study to acknowledge how biases may have impacted the study.

Constructivist–interpretivist researchers will also bracket their biases, but they see their biases, more so than do postpositivists, as a means to dialogue with the farm workers. For example, if the researcher or a member of her or his extended family has some experience with Mexico, the immigrant experience, or migrant work experience, she or he may use this sensitivity to enhance the rapport and dialogue with the farm workers (see Patton's, 1990, heuristic qualitative approach). In their research reports, constructivist–interpretivists will talk at length about their personal/family experiences with the migrant experience and will likely keep a reflective journal noting the emotional impact of the interview process on themselves. Finally, critical–ideological researchers will acknowledge at the outset of their study that they expect their results to document the high levels of stress and poor working conditions of the migrant workers and that, furthermore, the results and report of the study will be used in some way to lobby for improved working and living conditions for study participants. Additionally, a few of the farm workers will be involved as coinvestigators and coauthors of the study.

### **Rhetorical Structure**

*Rhetoric* refers to the language used to present the procedures and results of research to one's intended audience. Rhetoric, understandably, flows closely from one's epistemological and axiological stance. In the positivist and postpositivist positions, in which objectivity and a detached, emotionally neutral research role prevails, rhetoric is precise and "scientific," presented in an objective manner. By marked contrast, in the constructivist and criticalist stances, in which a subjective and interactive researcher role prevails, the rhetoric of the final research report is in the first person and is often personalized. The researcher's own experience, expectations, biases, and values are detailed comprehensively. Furthermore, the impact of the research process on the emotional and intellectual life of the researcher is reflected upon and discussed openly.

### **Methodology**

*Methodology* refers to the process and procedures of the research. Naturally, research method flows from one's position on ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Positivists and postpositivists attempt to simulate, as closely as possible, strict scientific methods and procedures where variables are carefully controlled or manipulated, and where the researcher's emotional or expectant stance on the problem under study is irrelevant. The goal of this position is to uncover and explain relationships among variables that will eventually lead to universal or etic laws that form the foundation for prediction and control of phenomena. This position (particularly in the positivist extreme) attempts to embrace the "hard science" methods and goals of chemistry, physics, and mathematics. Understandably then, positivists and postpositivists

rely heavily on true experiments and analog methods and, when no alternative is available, on quasi-experimental methods.

By marked contrast, constructivists and criticalists, given their stance on the centrality of intense researcher–participant interaction and on the need to be immersed over longer periods of time in the participants' world, more often embrace naturalistic designs (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in which the researcher is ensconced in the community and day-to-day life of her or his research participants. Naturalistic inquiry leads to qualitative research methods such as in-depth face-to-face interviewing and participant observation.

### **The Universe of Qualitative Approaches and Locating Them Within Research Paradigms**

One challenge in understanding qualitative research is the overwhelming variety of extant approaches to inquiry. Qualitative research has roots in many disciplines—anthropology, sociology, education, psychology, history, literature—and as such, many markedly different qualitative approaches have appeared in the literature over the last century (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a; and Patton, 1990, for reviews). Describing these approaches is beyond the scope of this article, though a number of them are reviewed in subsequent articles in this *JCP* special issue.

Another challenge of qualitative inquiry is that strong qualitative research can emanate from multiple paradigms, each valid in its own right, and each with its own criteria for conducting and evaluating research. Therefore, it is important that counseling researchers understand and clearly explicate their operating paradigm in the reporting of studies. In Elliott, Fischer, and Rennie's (1999) often-cited guidelines for publishing qualitative research, the first guideline recommends "owning one's perspective" (p. 221), which involves stating one's guiding paradigm, methodology, and personal orientation (i.e., experience with and expectations of phenomena under study). It is essential that researchers, as well as journal editorial board members and grant reviewers, "locate" research studies within a specific research paradigm. Clearly, understanding a study's purpose, goals, methods, and procedures necessitates paradigmatic knowledge. Furthermore, effectively evaluating the quality of a research study is, in great part, dependent on the anchoring paradigm (see Morrow, 2005).

To demonstrate the process of locating a particular qualitative approach within a specific research paradigm, I turn to the two most frequently used qualitative inquiry approaches incorporated in *JCP*<sup>1</sup> studies over the past 15 years: consensual qualitative

<sup>1</sup> In preparing to write this article, I conducted a 15-year methodological content analysis of *JCP* (1989–2003) to determine the paradigmatic bases and research approaches incorporated in qualitative research. I invite readers to e-mail me for a copy of the complete method and results, as only a very brief summary is provided here.

Each *JCP* article was logged into one of five categories: quantitative studies, qualitative studies, mixed method studies, conceptual or review pieces, and invited comments/reactions/reply articles. Mixed method studies were categorized by using the "Big Q" and "little q" distinction of Walsh-Bowers (2002). "Big Q" studies emphasize qualitative methods in their own right as stand-alone designs and are not seen as a prequel to or sequel of primarily quantitative research.

During the review period, *JCP* published 825 articles, of which 672

research (CQR; Hill et al., 2005; Hill, Thompson, & William, 1997) and grounded theory (GT; Fassinger, 2005; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

CQR is a recent qualitative explication that was developed by counseling psychologists studying psychotherapy processes and looking to integrate the descriptive depth and richness of constructivist qualitative methods with the postpositivist reliance on interpretive consensus (agreement). Specifically, in fashioning CQR, the originators relied heavily on the established qualitative approaches of grounded theory (sociology base), phenomenology (psychology base), and comprehensive process analysis (psychology [psychotherapy] base; see Hill et al., 1997, for specifics).

To locate CQR within a research paradigm, one must consider the inquiry model's stance on the philosophy of science parameters. With regard to ontology, CQR relies on research team member and external auditor consensus in arriving at domains and core ideas (see Hill et al., 2005; Hill et al., 1997). Thus, the implication is that there is one true approximal reality, rather than multiple equally valid realities. Thus, on the parameter of ontology, CQR can be characterized as postpositivist.

In reference to epistemology, CQR often uses medium-length (often 30–60 min) interviews that are semistructured and that attempt to maintain consistency across participants. The length and structure of the interview protocols do not lead to intense researcher–participant interaction or extensive discovery, and thus, I would classify the epistemology of CQR as falling somewhere between postpositivism and constructivism.

With regard to axiology, the CQR research team acknowledges and brackets their expectations and biases. Thus, on the axiology continuum, CQR leans toward the constructivist paradigm. Moving to rhetorical structure, CQR often summarizes domains and categories in tabular form and assigns frequency labels (general, typical, variant) on the basis of counts across interviews. Though brief sample quotes of participants are often included in CQR write-ups, little of the “voice” of the participants is presented in terms of extensive quotes that capture the *Erlebnis* (lived experience) of the participants. Thus, I would classify the rhetorical structure of CQR as falling between postpositivism and constructivism.

Finally, with regard to method, CQR most often uses face-to-face interviews (sometimes phone interviews), and interviewers follow a semistructured interview protocol. Though CQR allows for probes and clarifications during interviews, researchers are expected to cover the entire semistructured protocol. This leads to

verification (confirmation) and explanation of literature-based themes inherent in protocol questions as well as to some degree of true “discovery.” Furthermore, the interview protocol does not change from interview to interview as in constructivist paradigms and theoretical sampling methods. Thus, I would classify the methods of CQR as falling between constructivism and postpositivism.

In summary, then, CQR falls between the postpositivism and constructivist paradigms, leaning toward the postpositivist end. Individual studies may vary somewhat in where they fall along this continuum. It is interesting to note that in Hill et al.'s (2005) latest explication of CQR, I have noted some movement toward constructivism–interpretivism relative to their initial explication (Hill et al., 1997). I classify most of the extant CQR studies as postpositivist–constructivist. This brief paradigmatic analysis also highlights the complexity of locating a particular qualitative approach in one specific paradigm. I refer the reader to Hill et al. (2005), who take a slightly different stance when locating CQR philosophically.

Now I turn to a paradigmatic analysis of grounded theory, one of the most established and respected qualitative methods. In fact, grounded theory has been characterized as the “market leader” in qualitative research (McLeod, 2001, p. 70) and has been given credit for being in the “front of the qualitative revolution” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 509). Grounded theory was first explicated in Glaser and Strauss (1967) and originated in studies of the “awareness of dying” (Glaser & Strauss, 1965). In developing the grounded theory approach, the originators drew on their own training and research, with Barney Glaser hailing from the quantitative sociology tradition at Columbia University and Anselm Strauss working from the University of Chicago's qualitative sociology tradition (see Charmaz, 2000, for a concise history). As a result, paradigmatically speaking, the reader can locate components of grounded theory within multiple research traditions. Charmaz identifies both positivist (objective underpinnings, explicit coding and data reduction/analytic procedures) and postpositivist (verification focus) components of grounded theory as set forth by its originators.

It is interesting to note that since the origination of the approach, its developers have diverged somewhat in its elaboration and development (Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Furthermore, researchers not originally associated with the development of grounded theory have adopted it and adapted their own version of the approach. More specifically, McLeod (2001) identified five extant variations of grounded theory (see Fassinger, 2005, for further discussion).

At present, the most popular approach to grounded theory, particularly in counseling psychology, appears to be the constructivist-leaning approach endorsed by Charmaz (2000) and Rennie (1998). A review of the grounded theory studies published in *JCP* supports labeling the approach as primarily constructivist (see Footnote 1). With regard to ontology, grounded theory does not assume a single objective reality that can be agreed upon by independent researchers. In fact, in their original work, Glaser and Strauss (1967) stated that “dependent on the skills and sensitivities of the analyst, the constant comparative method is not designed (as methods of quantitative analysis are) to guarantee that two analysts working independently with the same data will achieve the same results” (p. 103). Thus, grounded theory allows for multiple inter-

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(81%) were quantitative studies; 39 (5%) were qualitative studies; 22 (3%) were multimethod (mixed method) studies, with 10 classified as “Big Q” and 12 as “small q”; 25 (3%) were non-data-based conceptual or review articles; and 67 (8%) were invited brief comment/reply/reaction articles. Chronological trends show that the percentage of qualitative studies increased substantially from the editorial term of Harmon (0.6%) to those of Hill (7.6%) and Hansen (6.9%).

Regarding the paradigmatic base of the 49 qualitative and “Big Q” mixed method studies identified, 21 are classified as constructivist, 9 as postpositivist, 17 as postpositivist/constructivist, and 2 as constructivist/postpositivist. With regard to specific qualitative inquiry approaches inherent in the 49 studies, the most frequently used were consensual qualitative research ( $n = 17$  studies), grounded theory ( $n = 10$  studies), and phenomenology ( $n = 7$  studies).



pretations and realities and therefore would be classified as constructivist in ontology.

With regard to epistemology, many grounded theory studies in counseling psychology have relied on face-to-face interviews of up to 3 hr, allowing for fairly intense researcher–participant interaction and discourse. Such interactions allow for the examination of the lived experience (*Erlebnis*) of the participants and the hermeneutic (interpretive) understanding of these experiences. Thus, I would classify the epistemology of the majority of grounded theory research as constructivist.

Focusing on axiology, grounded theorists generally acknowledge and explicate their biases and expectations in their research; this represents a constructivist perspective. Rhetorically speaking, grounded theory studies are written in the first person and usually include extensive “voice” of participants through the selection of representative quotations. Thus, the rhetoric inherent in grounded theory research follows a constructivist paradigm. Finally, with regard to method, grounded theory studies in counseling psychology have tended to use theoretical sampling and lengthy face-to-face interviews with an evolving and changing semistructured interview protocol. More so than CQR, grounded theory has tended to be more discovery-oriented, and I would classify the common methods of grounded theory to fall under the constructivist–interpretivist paradigm. In conclusion, though there is some debate regarding the anchoring paradigm of grounded theory research, I place the preponderance of grounded theory studies in counseling psychology within a constructivist paradigm. It is not surprising that the majority of qualitative research published in *JCP* (see Footnote 1) in recent years has emanated from postpositivist or constructivist paradigms, or some combination of the two.

### Concluding Comment: Counseling Researchers as Bricoleurs

Consistent with the wide universe of qualitative approaches, counseling psychology researchers are drawing on many qualitative traditions often located within postpositivist and constructivist paradigms. This is not surprising because qualitative researchers often act as bricoleurs in achieving their research goals. Denzin and Lincoln (2000b) define bricoleur as a,

... Jack of all trades or a kind of do-it-yourself person [who deploys] whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials are at hand. . . . If new tools or techniques have to be invented, or pieced together, then the researcher will do this. (p. 4)

In fashioning their CQR method, Hill et al. (1997, 2005) were acting as bricoleurs as they integrated grounded theory, phenomenology, and comprehensive process analysis in striking a balance between postpositivist and constructivist lenses. The notion of bricoleur may be unsettling to researchers socialized into positivist and postpositivist paradigms, but it is consistent with the methodological flexibility more common to constructivist and critical theory paradigms.

As the field of counseling psychology continues to evolve, I expect that more of us will become bricoleurs as we draw on various research paradigms and multiple inquiry methods, as well as mixed methods (see Hanson, Creswell, Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003), to answer questions of

mental health, healing processes, and quality of life. When I began writing this article, I concurred strongly with some of my colleagues (e.g., Hoshmand, 1989; McLeod, 2001; Morrow & Smith, 2000) that counseling psychology had been resistant to widely embracing alternate inquiry methods. As I conclude work on this article, I am left with a sense of optimism that our field, within a few short decades, will be characterized by a philosophical and methodological pluralism that will markedly improve the scientific training we provide to our students and, ultimately, the quality of service we provide to our clients.

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