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Philosophical Assumptions and Interpretive Frameworks

Whether we are aware of it or not, we always bring certain beliefs and ***philosophical assumptions*** to our research. Sometimes these are deeply ingrained views about the types of problems that we need to study, what research questions to ask, or how we go about gathering data. These beliefs are instilled in us during our educational training through journal articles and books, through advice dispensed by our advisors, and through the scholarly communities we engage at our conferences and scholarly meetings. The difficulty lies first in becoming aware of these assumptions and beliefs and second in deciding whether we will actively incorporate them into our qualitative studies. Often, at a less abstract level, these philosophical assumptions inform our choice of theories that guide our research. Theories are more apparent in our qualitative studies than are philosophical assumptions, and researchers, often trained in the use of theories, typically make them explicit in research studies.

Qualitative researchers have underscored the importance of not only understanding the beliefs and theories that inform our research but also actively writing about them in our reports and studies. This chapter highlights various philosophical assumptions that have occupied the minds of qualitative researchers for some years and the various theoretical and ***interpretive frameworks*** that enact these beliefs.

A close tie does exist between the philosophy that one brings to the research act and how one proceeds to use a framework to shroud his or her inquiry.

This chapter will help you begin to explore your philosophical assumptions and inform decisions about the influence of theories in your qualitative research. We do this by presenting a framework for understanding how both philosophy and theory fit into the large schema of the research process. Then we present details about philosophical assumptions common to qualitative researchers, consider the types of philosophical assumptions, and explore how they are often used or made explicit in qualitative studies. Finally, various interpretive frameworks are suggested that link back to philosophical assumptions with embedded commentary related to how these frameworks play out in the actual practice of research.

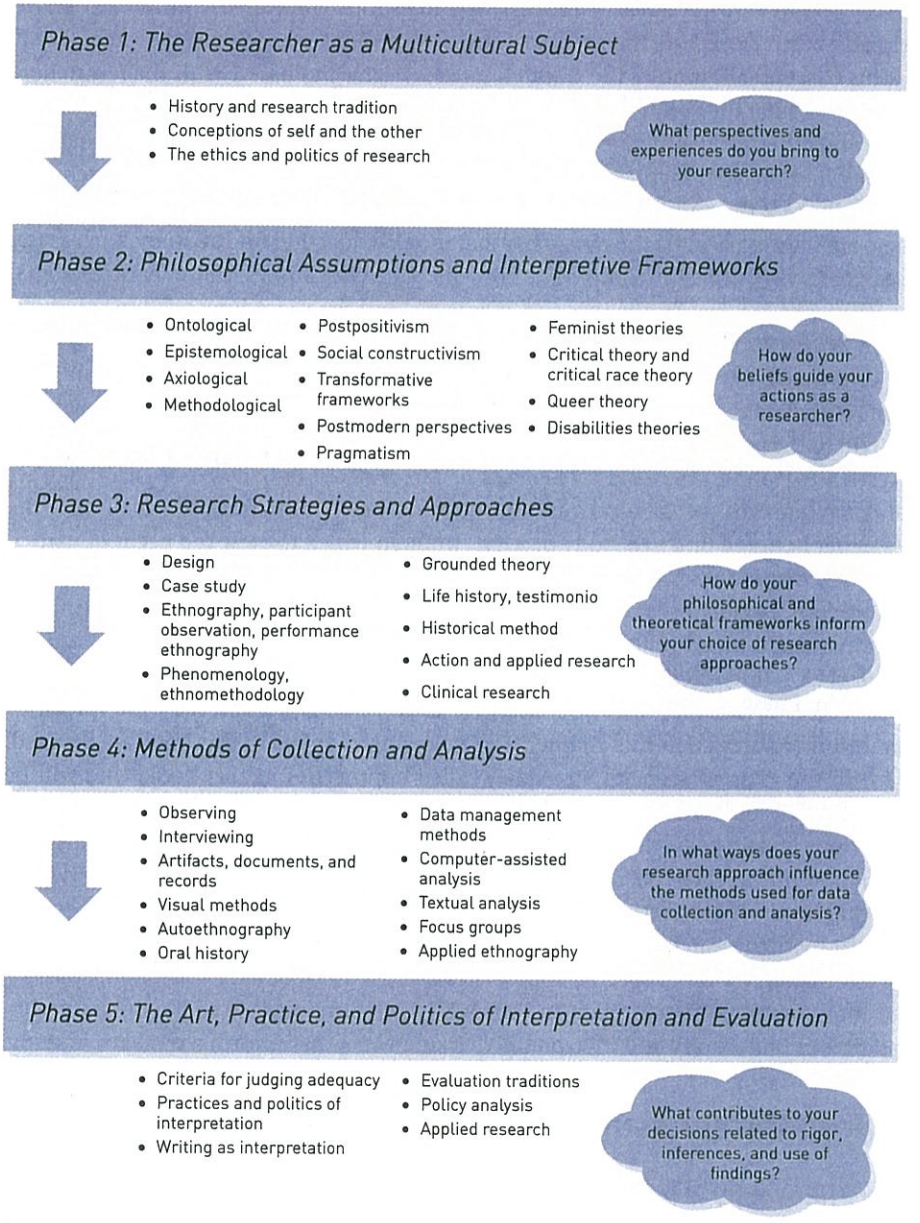
Questions for Discussion

- Where do philosophy and interpretive frameworks (theory) fit into the overall process of research?
- Why is it important to understand the philosophical assumptions?
- What four philosophical assumptions exist when you choose qualitative research?
- How are these philosophical assumptions used and written into a qualitative study?
- What types of interpretive frameworks are used in qualitative research?
- How are interpretive frameworks written into a qualitative study?
- How are philosophical assumptions and interpretive frameworks linked in a qualitative study?

Situating Philosophy and Interpretive Frameworks Within the Research Process

An understanding of the philosophical assumptions behind qualitative research begins with assessing where it fits within the overall process of research, noting its importance as an element of research, and considering how to actively write it into a study. To help in this process, we use a framework to guide understanding of how philosophical assumptions and interpretive frameworks (paradigm perspectives and theoretical orientations) are situated within and influential to the research process. *Philosophy* means the use of abstract ideas and beliefs that inform our research. We know that philosophical assumptions are typically the first ideas in developing a study, but how

FIGURE 2.1 • Situating Philosophy and Interpretive Frameworks Within the Research Process



Source: Adapted from Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 12). Used with permission, SAGE.

they relate to the overall process of research remains a mystery. It is here that adapting an overview of the process of research compiled by Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 12), as shown in Figure 2.1, helps us to situate philosophy and interpretative frameworks into perspective in the research process. The questions embedded within each phase help you begin to explore the philosophical assumptions you bring to research.

This conceptualization of the research process begins in Phase 1 with the researchers considering what they bring to the inquiry, such as their personal history, views of themselves and others, and ethical and political issues. Inquirers often overlook this phase, so it is helpful to have it highlighted and positioned first in the levels of the research process. In Phase 2 the researcher brings to the inquiry certain philosophical assumptions. These are stances taken by the researcher that provide direction for the study, such as the researcher's view of reality (ontology), how the researcher knows reality (epistemology), the value-stance taken by the inquirer (axiology), and the procedures used in the study (***methodology***). These assumptions, in turn, are often applied in research through the use of ***paradigms*** and theories (or, as we call them, interpretive frameworks). Paradigms are a "basic set of beliefs that guides action" (Guba, 1990, p. 17). These beliefs are brought to the process of research by the investigator and they may be called worldviews (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). ***Theories or theoretical orientations***, on the other hand, are found in the literature and they provide a general explanation as to what the researcher hopes to find in a study or a lens through which to view the needs of participants and communities in a study. Granted, the difference between the philosophical assumptions, paradigms, and theoretical orientation is not always clear, but sorting out what exists at a broad philosophical level (assumptions) and what operates at a more practical level (interpretive frameworks) is a helpful heuristic.

In Phase 2, we find the philosophical and paradigm/theoretical interpretative frameworks addressed in this chapter. The following chapters in this book are devoted, then, to the Phase 3 research strategies, called approaches in this book, that will be enumerated as they relate to the research process. Finally, the inquirer engages in Phase 4 methods of data collection and analysis, followed by Phase 5, the interpretation and evaluation of the data. Taking Figure 2.1 in its entirety, we see that research involves differing levels of abstraction from the broad assessment of individual characteristics brought by the researcher on through the researcher's philosophy and theory that lay the foundation for more specific approaches and methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Also implicit in Figure 2.1 is the importance of having an understanding of philosophy and interpretative frameworks that inform a qualitative study.

Philosophical Assumptions

Why Philosophy Is Important

We can begin by thinking about why it is important to understand the philosophical assumptions that underlie qualitative research and to be able to articulate them in a research study or present them to an audience. Huff (2009) is helpful in articulating the importance of philosophy in research.

- *Direction of research goals and outcomes.* How we formulate our problem and research questions to study is shaped by our assumptions and, in turn, influences how we seek information to answer the questions. A cause-and-effect type of question in which certain variables are predicted to explain an outcome is different from an exploration of a single phenomenon as found in qualitative research.

- *Scope of training and research experiences.* These assumptions are deeply rooted in our training and reinforced by the scholarly community in which we work. Granted, some communities are more eclectic and borrow from many disciplines (e.g., education), while others are more narrowly focused on studying specific research problems, using particular methods, and adding certain research knowledge.

- *Basis of evaluative criteria for research-related decisions.* Unquestionably, reviewers make philosophical assumptions about a study when they evaluate it. Knowing how reviewers stand on issues of epistemology is helpful to author–researchers. When the assumptions between the author and the reviewer diverge, the author's work may not receive a fair hearing, and conclusions may be drawn that it does not make a contribution to the literature. This unfair hearing may occur within the context of a graduate student presenting to a committee, an author submitting to a scholarly journal, or an investigator presenting a proposal to a funding agency. On the reverse side, understanding the differences used by a reviewer may enable a researcher to resolve points of difference before they become a focal point for critique.

The question as to whether key assumptions can change and/or whether multiple philosophical assumptions can be used in a given study needs to be addressed. Our stance is that assumptions can change over time and over a career, and they often do, especially after a scholar leaves the enclave of his or her discipline and begins to work in more of a trans- or multidisciplinary way. Whether multiple assumptions can be taken in a given study is open to debate, and again, it may be related to research experiences of the investigator, his or her openness to exploring using differing assumptions, and the acceptability of ideas taken in the larger scientific community of which he or she is a part. Looking across the four philosophical assumptions described next can be helpful for monitoring individual changes over time.

Four Philosophical Assumptions

What are the philosophical assumptions made by researchers when they undertake a qualitative study? These assumptions have been articulated throughout the past 20 years in the various editions of the *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2000, 2005, 2011) and as the "axiomatic" issues advanced by Guba and Lincoln (1988) as the guiding philosophy behind qualitative research. These beliefs have been called philosophical assumptions, epistemologies, and ontologies (Crotty, 1998); broadly conceived research methodologies (Neuman, 2000); and alternative knowledge claims (Creswell, 2009). They are beliefs about ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (what counts as knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified),

axiology (the role of values in research), and methodology (the process of research). In this discussion, we will first discuss each of these philosophical assumptions, detail how they might be used and written into qualitative research, and then link them to different interpretive frameworks that operate at a more specific level in the process of research (see Table 2.1).

The ***ontological*** issue relates to the nature of reality and its characteristics. When researchers conduct qualitative research, they are embracing the idea of multiple realities. Different researchers embrace different realities, as do the individuals being studied and the readers of a qualitative study. When studying individuals, qualitative researchers conduct a study with the intent of reporting these multiple realities. Evidence of multiple realities includes the use of multiple forms of evidence in themes using the actual words of different individuals and presenting different perspectives. For example, when writers compile a phenomenology, they report how individuals participating in the study view their experiences differently (Moustakas, 1994).

TABLE 2.1 ● Philosophical Assumptions With Implications for Practice

Assumption	Questions	Characteristics	Implications for Practice (Examples)
Ontological	What is the nature of reality?	Reality is multiple as seen through many views.	The researcher reports different perspectives as themes develop in the findings.
Epistemological	What counts as knowledge? How are knowledge claims justified? What is the relationship between the researcher and that being researched?	Subjective evidence is obtained from participants; the researcher attempts to lessen the distance between himself or herself and that being researched.	The researcher relies on quotes as evidence from the participant as well as collaborates, spends time in field with participants, and becomes an "insider."
Axiological	What is the role of values?	The researcher acknowledges that research is value-laden and that biases are present in relation to their role in the study context.	The researcher openly discusses values that shape the narrative and includes his or her own interpretation in conjunction with those of participants.
Methodological	What is the process of research? What is the language of research?	The researcher uses inductive logic, studies the topic within its context, and uses an emerging design.	The researcher works with particulars (details) before generalizations, describes in detail the context of the study, and continually revises questions from experiences in the field.

With the ***epistemological*** assumption, conducting a qualitative study means that researchers try to get as close as possible to the participants being studied. Therefore, subjective evidence is assembled based on individual views. This is how knowledge is known—through the subjective experiences of people. It becomes important, then, to conduct studies in the "field," where the participants live and work—these are important contexts for understanding what the participants are saying. The longer researchers stay in the field or get to know the participants, the more they "know what they know" from firsthand information. For example, a good ethnography requires prolonged stay at the research site (Wolcott, 2008a). In short, the qualitative researcher tries to minimize the "distance" or "objective separateness" (Guba & Lincoln, 1988, p. 94) between himself or herself and those being researched.

All researchers bring values to a study, but qualitative researchers make their values known in a study. This is the ***axiological*** assumption that characterizes qualitative research. In a qualitative study, the inquirers admit the value-laden nature of the study and actively report their values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered from the field. We say that researchers "position themselves" by identifying their "positionality" in relation to the context and setting of the research. Among the aspects described are researcher's social position (e.g., gender, age, race, immigration status), personal experiences, and political and professional beliefs (Berger, 2015). In an interpretive biography, for example, the researcher's presence is apparent in the text, and the author admits that the stories voiced represent an interpretation of the author as much as the subject of the study (Denzin, 1989).

The procedures of qualitative research, or its **methodology**, are characterized as inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher's experience in collecting and analyzing the data. The logic that the qualitative researcher follows is inductive, from the ground up, rather than handed down entirely from a theory or from the perspectives of the inquirer. Sometimes the research questions change in the middle of the study to reflect better the types of questions needed to understand the research problem. In response, the data collection strategy, planned before the study, needs to be modified to accompany the new questions. During the data analysis, the researcher follows a path of analyzing the data to develop an increasingly detailed knowledge of the topic being studied.

Writing Philosophical Assumptions Into Qualitative Studies

One further thought is important about philosophical assumptions. In some qualitative studies they remain hidden from view; they can be deduced, however, by the discerning reader who sees the multiple views that appear in the themes, the detailed rendering of the subjective quotes of participants, the carefully laid-out biases of the researcher, or the emerging design that evolves in ever-expanding levels of abstraction from description to themes to broad generalizations. In other studies, the philosophy is made explicit by a special section in the study—typically in the description of the characteristics of qualitative inquiry often found in the methods section. Here, the inquirer talks about

ontology, epistemology, and other assumptions explicitly and details how they are exemplified in the study. The form of this discussion is to convey the assumptions, to provide definitions for them, and to discuss how they are illustrated in the study. References to the literature about the philosophy of qualitative research round out the discussion. Sections of this nature are often found in doctoral dissertations, in journal articles reported in major qualitative journals, and in conference paper presentations where the audience may ask about the underlying philosophy of the study. While there are infinite ways for an author to go about describing their philosophical assumptions and implications for research practice, we offer three examples from journal articles to complement the examples provided.

EXAMPLE 2.1

JOURNAL ARTICLE EXAMPLES OF DESCRIPTIONS OF UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS

Notice how the philosophical assumptions are made explicit in each of the following journal articles:

a) Alongside the phenomenological approach description for the study examining the meaning that people with liver failure ascribe to the experience of waiting for a liver transplant (Brown, Sorrell, McClaren, & Creswell, 2006, p. 122)

b) Integrated within the description of the Piliriqatigiinniq Partnership Community Health Research model guiding the study within the methods section (Healey, 2014, p. e134–135)

c) Embedded within researcher positionality description under the heading of Positioning the Mobile Ethnographer (Jungnickel, 2014, p. 642)

Interpretive Frameworks

In Figure 2.1, the philosophical assumptions are often applied within interpretive frameworks that qualitative researchers use when they conduct a study. Thus, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) consider the philosophical assumptions (ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology) as key premises that are folded into interpretive frameworks used in qualitative research. What are these interpretive frameworks? They may be paradigms, or beliefs that the researcher brings to the process of research, or they may be theories or theoretical orientations that guide the practice of research. Paradigm interpretative frameworks may be ***postpositivism***, ***social constructivism***,

transformation, and postmodern. Theories may be ***social science theories*** to frame their theoretical lens in studies, such as the use of these theories in ethnography (see Chapter 4). Social science theories may be theories of leadership, attribution, political influence and control, and hundreds of other possibilities that are taught in the social science disciplines. On the other hand, the theories may be ***social justice theories*** or advocacy/participatory theories seeking to bring about change or address social justice issues in our societies. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state, "We want a social science committed up front to issues of social justice, equity, nonviolence, peace, and universal human rights" (p. 11).

The interpretive frameworks seem to be ever expanding, and the list in Figure 2.1 does not account for all that are popularly used in qualitative research. Another approach that has been extensively discussed elsewhere is the realist perspective that combines a realist ontology (the belief that a real world exists independently of our beliefs and constructions) and a constructivist epistemology (knowledge of the world is inevitably our own construction; see Maxwell, 2012). Consequently, any discussion (including this one) can only be a partial description of possibilities, but a review of several major interpretive frameworks can provide a sense of options. The participants in these interpretive, theoretically oriented projects often represent underrepresented or marginalized groups, whether those differences take the form of gender, race, class, religion, sexuality, or geography (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005) or some intersection of these differences.

Postpositivism

Those who engage in qualitative research using a belief system grounded in postpositivism will take a scientific approach to research. They will employ a social science theoretical lens. We will use the term *postpositivism* rather than *positivism* to denote this approach because postpositivists do not believe in strict cause and effect but rather recognize that all cause and effect is a probability that may or may not occur. Postpositivism has the elements of being reductionistic, logical, empirical, cause-and-effect oriented, and deterministic based on a priori theories. We can see this approach at work among individuals with prior quantitative research training and in fields such as the health sciences in which qualitative research often plays a supportive role to quantitative research and must be couched in terms acceptable to quantitative researchers and funding agents (e.g., the a priori use of theory; see Barbour, 2000). A good overview of postpositivist approaches is available in Phillips and Burbules (2000) and Churchill, Plano Clark, Prochaska-Cue, Creswell, and Onta-Grzebik (2007).

In practice, postpositivist researchers view inquiry as a series of logically related steps, believe in multiple perspectives from participants rather than a single reality, and espouse rigorous methods of qualitative data collection and analysis. They use multiple levels of data analysis for rigor, employ computer programs to assist in their analysis, encourage the use of validity approaches, and write their qualitative studies

in the form of scientific reports, with a structure resembling quantitative articles (e.g., problem, questions, data collection, results, conclusions). Our approaches to qualitative research have been identified as belonging to postpositivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), as have the approaches of others (e.g., Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). We do tend to use this belief system, although neither of us would not characterize all of our research as framed within a postpositivist qualitative orientation (e.g., see the constructivist approach in McVea, Harter, McEntarffer, & Creswell, 1999; the social justice perspective in Miller, Creswell, & Olander, 1998; and the pragmatic approach in Henderson, 2011). This postpositivist interpretive framework is exemplified in the systematic procedures of grounded theory found in Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) and Corbin and Strauss (2007, 2015), the analytic data analysis steps in phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994), and the data analysis strategies of case comparisons of Yin (2014).

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism (which is often described as interpretivism; see Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Mertens, 2015) is another paradigm or worldview. In social constructivism, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences—meanings directed toward certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories or ideas. The goal of research, then, is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation. Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. In other words, they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social construction) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives. Rather than starting with a theory (as in postpositivism), inquirers generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning. Examples of writers who have summarized this position are Burr (2015), Crotty (1998), Lincoln and Guba (2000), and Schwandt (2007).

In terms of practice, the questions become broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation, a meaning typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons. The more open-ended the questioning, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life setting. Thus, constructivist researchers often address the "processes" of interaction among individuals. They also focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants. Researchers recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they "position themselves" in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences. Thus the researchers make an interpretation of what they find, an interpretation shaped by their own experiences and background; for example, see study impetus described by Brown et al. (2006). The researcher's intent, then, is to make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world. This is why qualitative research is often called interpretive research.

We see the constructivist worldview manifest in phenomenological studies, in which individuals describe their experiences (Moustakas, 1994), and in the grounded theory perspective of Charmaz (2014), in which she grounds her theoretical orientation in the views or perspectives of individuals.

Transformative Frameworks

Researchers might use an alternative framework, a ***transformative framework***, because the postpositivists impose structural laws and theories that do not fit marginalized individuals or groups and the constructivists do not go far enough in advocating action to help individuals. The basic tenet of this transformative framework is that knowledge is not neutral and it reflects the power and social relationships within society; thus, the purpose of knowledge construction is to aid people to improve society (Mertens, 2003). These individuals include marginalized groups such as indigenous groups, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender persons, queers, and societies that need a more hopeful, positive psychology and resilience (Mertens, 2009, 2015).

Qualitative research, then, should contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of participants, the institutions in which they live and work, or even the researchers' lives. The issues facing these marginalized groups are of paramount importance to study—issues such as oppression, domination, suppression, alienation, and hegemony. As these issues are studied and exposed, the researchers provide a voice for these participants, raising their consciousness and improving their lives (for an educational example, see Job et al., 2013). Describing it as participatory action research, Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998) embrace features of this transformative framework:

- Participatory action is recursive or dialectical and is focused on bringing about change in practices. Thus, in participatory action research studies, inquirers advance an action agenda for change.
- It is focused on helping individuals free themselves from constraints found in the media, in language, in work procedures, and in the relationships of power in educational settings. Participatory studies often begin with an important issue or stance about the problems in society, such as the need for empowerment.
- It is emancipatory in that it helps unshackle people from the constraints of irrational and unjust structures that limit self-development and self-determination. The aim of this approach is to create a political debate and discussion so that change will occur.
- It is practical and collaborative because it is inquiry completed "with" others rather than "on" or "to" others. In this spirit, participatory authors engage the participants as active collaborators in their inquiries.

Other researchers who embrace this worldview are Fay (1987) and Heron and Reason (1997). In practice, this framework has shaped several approaches to inquiry. Specific social issues (e.g., domination, oppression, inequity) help organize the research questions. Not wanting to further marginalize the individuals participating in

the research, transformative inquirers collaborate with research participants. They may ask participants to help with designing the questions, collecting the data, analyzing it, and shaping the final report of the research. In this way, the "voice" of the participants becomes heard throughout the research process and the research products meaningful for all involved. It is encouraging to see guiding research resources emerge from the perspectives of marginalized groups (e.g., Lovern & Locust, 2013; Mertens, Cram, & Chilisa, 2013). The research also contains an action agenda for reform, a specific plan for addressing the injustices of the marginalized group. These practices will be seen in the ethnographic approaches to research with a social justice agenda found in Denzin and Lincoln (2011) and in the change-oriented forms of narrative research (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004).

Postmodern Perspectives

Thomas (1993) calls postmodernists "armchair radicals" (p. 23) who focus their critiques on changing ways of thinking rather than on calling for action based on these changes. ***Postmodernism*** might be considered a family of theories and perspectives that have something in common (Slife & Williams, 1995). The basic concept is that knowledge claims must be set within the conditions of the world today and in the multiple perspectives of class, race, gender, and other group affiliations. These conditions are well articulated by individuals such as Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, Giroux, and Freire (Bloland, 1995). These are negative conditions, and they show themselves in the presence of hierarchies, power and control by individuals, and the multiple meanings of language. The conditions include the importance of different discourses, the importance of marginalized people and groups (the "other"), and the presence of "metanarratives" or universals that hold true regardless of the social conditions. Also included is the need to "deconstruct" texts in terms of language, their reading and their writing, and the examining and bringing to the surface of concealed hierarchies as well as dominations, oppositions, inconsistencies, and contradictions (Bloland, 1995; Clarke, 2005; Stringer, 1993). Denzin's (1989) approach to "interpretive" biography, Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) approach to narrative research, and Clarke's (2005) perspective on grounded theory draw on postmodernism in that researchers study turning points, or problematic situations in which people find themselves during transition periods (Borgatta & Borgatta, 1992). Regarding a "postmodern-influenced ethnography," Thomas (1993) writes that such a study might "confront the centrality of media-created realities and the influence of information technologies" (p. 25). Thomas also comments that narrative texts need to be challenged (and written), according to the postmodernists, for their "subtexts" of dominant meanings.

Pragmatism

There are many forms of ***pragmatism***. Individuals holding an interpretive framework based on pragmatism focus on the outcomes of the research—the actions, situations, and consequences of inquiry—rather than antecedent conditions (as in postpositivism).

There is a concern with applications—"what works"—and solutions to problems (Patton, 1990). Thus, instead of a focus on methods, the important aspect of research is the problem being studied and the questions asked about this problem (see Rossman & Wilson, 1985). Cherryholmes (1992) and Murphy (1990) provide direction for the basic ideas:

- Pragmatism is not committed to any one system of philosophy and reality.
- Individual researchers have a freedom of choice. They are "free" to choose the methods, techniques, and procedures of research that best meet their needs and purposes.
- Pragmatists do not see the world as an absolute unity. In a similar way, researchers look to many approaches to collecting and analyzing data rather than subscribing to only one way (e.g., multiple qualitative approaches).
- Truth is what works at the time; it is not based in a dualism between reality independent of the mind or within the mind.
- Pragmatist researchers look to the "what" and "how" of research based on its intended consequences—where they want to go with it.
- Pragmatists agree that research always occurs in social, historical, political, and other contexts.
- Pragmatists have believed in an external world independent of the mind as well as those lodged in the mind. They believe (Cherryholmes, 1992) that we need to stop asking questions about reality and the laws of nature. "They would simply like to change the subject" (Rorty, 1983, p. xiv).
- Recent writers embracing this worldview include Rorty (1990), Murphy (1990), Patton (1990), Cherryholmes (1992), and Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003).

In practice, the individual using this worldview will use multiple methods of data collection to best answer the research question, will employ multiple sources of data collection, will focus on the practical implications of the research, and will emphasize the importance of conducting research that best addresses the research problem. In the discussion here of the five approaches to research, you will see this framework at work when ethnographers employ both quantitative (e.g., surveys) and qualitative data collection (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) and when case study researchers use both quantitative and qualitative data (Luck, Jackson, & Usher, 2006; Yin, 2014).

Feminist Theories

Feminism draws on different theoretical and pragmatic orientations, different international contexts, and different dynamic developments (Olesen, 2011). ***Feminist research approaches*** center on and make problematic women's diverse situations and the institutions that frame those situations. Research topics may include a postcolonial thought related to forms of feminism depending on the context of nationalism, globalization and diverse international contexts

(e.g., sex workers, domestic servants), and work by or about specific groups of women, such as standpoint theories about lesbians, women with disabilities, and women of color (Olesen, 2011). The theme of domination prevails in the feminist literature as well, but the subject matter is often gender domination within a patriarchal society. Feminist research also embraces many of the tenets of postmodern and poststructuralist critiques as a challenge to the injustices of current society. In feminist research approaches, the goals are to establish collaborative and nonexploitative relationships, to place the researcher within the study so as to avoid objectification, and to conduct research that is transformative. Reinharz (1992) concludes that the use of diverse research methods during the previous two decades has greatly benefited feminist scholarship. Recent critical trends address protecting indigenous knowledge and the intersectionality of feminist research (e.g., the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, able-bodiedness, and age; Olesen, 2011). Noteworthy among these emerging conversations about intersectionality of feminist theory is the application of a transformative paradigm with social justice (Thornton Dill & Kohlman, 2012) and with ***critical race theory*** (Chepp, 2015).

One of the leading scholars of this approach, Lather (1991), comments on the essential perspectives of this framework. Feminist researchers see gender as a basic organizing principle that shapes the conditions of their lives. It is "a lens that brings into focus particular questions" (Fox-Keller, 1985, p. 6). The questions feminists pose relate to the centrality of gender in the shaping of our consciousness. The aim of this ideological research is to "correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position" (Lather, 1991, p. 71). Another writer, Stewart (1994), translates feminist critiques and methodology into procedural guides. She suggests that researchers need to look for what has been left out in social science writing, and to study women's lives and issues such as identities, sex roles, domestic violence, abortion activism, comparable worth, affirmative action, and the way in which women struggle with their social devaluation and powerlessness within their families. Also, researchers need to consciously and systematically include their own roles or positions and assess how they impact their understandings of a woman's life. In addition, Stewart (1994) views women as having agency, the ability to make choices and resist oppression, and she suggests that researchers need to inquire into how a woman understands her gender, acknowledging that gender is a social construct that differs for each individual. An example of such a study that was undertaken by Therberge (1997) focused on the place of physicality in the practice of women's hockey. Stewart (1994) highlights the importance of studying power relationships and individuals' social position and how they impact women. Finally, she sees each woman as different and recommends that scholars avoid the search for a unified or coherent self or voice.

Recent discussions indicate that the approach of finding appropriate methods for feminist research has given way to the thought that any method can be made feminist (Deem, 2002; Moss, 2007). Olesen (2011) summarizes the current state of feminist research under a number of transformative developments (e.g., globalization,

transnational feminism), critical trends (e.g., endarkened, decolonizing research and intersectionality), continuing issues (e.g., bias, troubling traditional concepts), enduring concerns (e.g., participants' voices, ethics), influences on feminist work (e.g., the academy and publishing), and challenges of the future (e.g., the interplay of multiple factors in women's lives, hidden oppressions). Recent discussions about emergent practices integrate international perspectives (e.g., Brisolara, Seigart, & SenGupta, 2014) and new research technologies (e.g., Hesse-Biber, 2012).

Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory

Critical theory perspectives are concerned with empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender (Fay, 1987). Researchers need to acknowledge their own power, engage in dialogues, and use theory to interpret or illuminate social action (Madison, 2011). Central themes that a critical researcher might explore include the scientific study of social institutions and their transformations through interpreting the meanings of social life; the historical problems of domination, alienation, and social struggles; and a critique of society and the envisioning of new possibilities (Fay, 1987; Morrow & Brown, 1994).

In research, critical theory can be defined by the particular configuration of methodological postures it embraces. The critical researcher might design, for example, an ethnographic study to include changes in how people think; encourage people to interact, form networks, become activists, and form action-oriented groups; and help individuals examine the conditions of their existence (Madison, 2011; Thomas, 1993). The end goal of the study might be social theorizing, which Morrow and Brown (1994) define as "the desire to comprehend and, in some cases, transform (through praxis) the underlying orders of social life—those social and systemic relations that constitute society" (p. 211). The investigator accomplishes this, for example, through an intensive case study or across a small number of historically comparable cases of specific actors (biographies), mediations, or systems and through "ethnographic accounts (interpretive social psychology), componential taxonomies (cognitive anthropology), and formal models (mathematical sociology)" (p. 212). In critical action research in teacher education, for example, Kincheloe (1991) recommends that the "critical teacher" exposes the assumptions of existing research orientations; critiques the knowledge base; and through these critiques reveals ideological effects on teachers, schools, and the culture's view of education. The design of research within a critical theory approach, according to sociologist Agger (1991), falls into two broad categories: *methodological*, in that it affects the ways in which people write and read, and *substantive*, in the theories and topics of the investigator (e.g., theorizing about the role of the state and culture in advanced capitalism). An often-cited classic of critical theory is the ethnography from Willis (1977) of the "lads" who participated in behavior as opposition to authority, as informal groups "having a laff" (p. 29) as a form of resistance to their school. As a study of the manifestations of

resistance and state regulation, it highlights ways in which actors come to terms with and struggle against cultural forms that dominate them (Morrow & Brown, 1994). Resistance is also the theme addressed in an ethnography of a subcultural group of youths (Haenfler, 2004).

Critical race theory focuses theoretical attention on "studying and transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 3). Race and racism is deeply embedded within the framework of American society (Parker & Lynn, 2002) and has directly shaped the U.S. legal system and the ways people think about the law, racial categories, and privilege (Harris, 1993). According to Parker and Lynn (2002), critical race theory has three main goals. Its first goal is to present stories about discrimination from the perspective of people of color. These may be qualitative case studies of descriptions and interviews. These cases may then be drawn together to build cases against racially biased officials or discriminatory practices. Since many stories advance White privilege through "majoritarian" master narratives, counterstories by people of color can help to shatter the complacency that may accompany such privilege and challenge the dominant discourses that serve to suppress people on the margins of society (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). As a second goal, critical race theory argues for the eradication of racial subjugation while simultaneously recognizing that race is a social construct (Parker & Lynn, 2002). In this view, *race* is not a fixed term but one that is fluid and continually shaped by political pressures and informed by individual lived experiences. Finally, the third goal of critical race theory addresses other areas of difference, such as gender, class, and any inequities experienced by individuals. As Parker and Lynn (2002) comment, "In the case of Black women, race does not exist outside of gender and gender does not exist outside of race" (p. 12). In research, the use of critical race theory methodology means that the researcher foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process; challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of people of color; and offers transformative solutions to racial, gender, and class subordination in our societal and institutional structures. Researchers sometimes use critical race theory in concert with other frameworks—for example, disability studies (Watts & Erevelles, 2004) or feminist theories (Chepp, 2015).

Queer Theory

Queer theory is characterized by a variety of methods and strategies relating to individual identity (Plummer, 2011a; Watson, 2005). As a body of literature continuing to evolve, it explores the myriad complexities of the construct, identity, and how identities reproduce and "perform" in social forums. Writers also use a postmodern or poststructural orientation to critique and deconstruct dominant theories related to identity (Plummer, 2011a, 2011b; Watson, 2005). They focus on how it is culturally and historically constituted, is linked to discourse, and overlaps gender and sexuality. The term itself—*queer theory,* rather than *gay, lesbian,* or *homosexual theory*—allows for keeping open to question the elements of race, class, age, and anything

else (Turner, 2000), and it is a term that has changed in meaning over the years and differs across cultures and languages (Plummer, 2011b). Most queer theorists work to challenge and undercut identity as singular, fixed, or normal (Watson, 2005). They also seek to challenge categorization processes and their deconstructions, rather than focus on specific populations. The historical binary distinctions are inadequate to describe sexual identity. Plummer (2011a) provides a concise overview of the queer theory stance:

- Both the heterosexual/homosexual binary and the sex/gender split are challenged.
- There is a decentering of identity.
- All sexual categories (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, heterosexual) are open, fluid, and nonfixed.
- Mainstream homosexuality is critiqued.
- Power is embodied discursively.
- All normalizing strategies are shunned.
- Academic work may become ironic and often comic and paradoxical.
- Versions of homosexual subject positions are inscribed everywhere.
- Deviance is abandoned, and interest lies in insider and outsider perspectives and transgressions.
- Common objects of study are films, videos, novels, poetry, and visual images.
- The most frequent interests include the social worlds of the so-called radical sexual fringe (e.g., drag kings and queens, sexual playfulness). (p. 201)

Although queer theory is less a methodology and more a focus of inquiry, queer methods often find expression in a rereading of cultural texts (e.g., films, literature); ethnographies and case studies of sexual worlds that challenge assumptions; data sources that contain multiple texts; documentaries that include performances; and projects that focus on individuals (Plummer, 2011a). Queer theorists have engaged in research and/or political activities such as the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and Queer Nation around HIV/AIDS awareness, as well as artistic and cultural representations of art and theater aimed at disrupting or rendering unnatural and strange practices that are taken for granted. These representations convey the voices and experiences of individuals who have been suppressed (Gamson, 2000) and provide important insights for informing policies and practices (e.g., Adams, Braun, & McCreanor, 2014). Useful readings about queer theory are found in the journal article overview provided by Watson (2005) and the chapter by Plummer (2011a, 2011b) and also in key books, such as the book by Tierney (1997).

Disability Theories

Disability inquiry addresses the meaning of inclusion in schools and encompasses administrators, teachers, and parents who have children with disabilities (Mertens, 2009, 2015). Mertens (2003) recounts how disability research has moved through

stages of development, from the medical model of disability (sickness and the role of the medical community in threatening it) to an environmental response to individuals with a disability. Now, researchers using a ***disability interpretive lens*** focus on disability as a dimension of human difference and not as a defect. As a human difference, its meaning is derived from social construction (i.e., society's response to individuals), and it is simply one dimension of human difference (Mertens, 2003). Viewing individuals with disabilities as different is reflected in the research process, such as in the types of questions asked, the labels applied to these individuals, considerations of how the data collection will benefit the community, the appropriateness of communication methods, and how the data are reported in a way that is respectful of power relationships. Mertens, Sullivan, and Stace (2011) have also linked critical disability theory with transformative frameworks because of its use as an intersection for many sources of discrimination. Resources for guiding research informed by disabilities theories are available (e.g., Barnes, Oliver, & Barton, 2002; Kroll, Barbour, & Harris, 2007).

The Practice of Using Interpretive Frameworks in Qualitative Research

The practice of using interpretive frameworks in a qualitative study varies, and it depends on the framework being used and the particular researcher's approach. Each of the descriptions of the interpretive frameworks highlighted unique researcher influences, goals, and practices. Qualitative researchers have found it helpful to distinguish among the interpretive frameworks to see at this point an overall summary (Table 2.2). Once researchers can distinguish among the interpretive frameworks then it is easier to see how they are applied in practice. At the most fundamental level, there are differences and commonalities in which they are trying to accomplish—their goals. Seeking an understanding of the world is different from generating solutions to real-world problems. Potential similarities among the goals should be noted. Feminist theories, critical theory and critical race theory, queer theories, and disability theories share a general intent for researchers to base calls for action on documented struggles. Some common elements to how the interpretive framework will be practiced can be identified:

- Research focuses on understanding specific issues or topics. The problems and the research questions explored aim to allow the researcher an understanding of specific issues or topics—the conditions that serve to disadvantage and exclude individuals or cultures, such as hierarchy, hegemony, racism, sexism, unequal power relations, identity, or inequities in our society.

- Research procedures are sensitive to participants and context. The procedures of research, such as data collection, data analysis, representing the material to audiences, and standards of evaluation and ethics, emphasize an interpretive stance. During

data collection, the researcher does not further marginalize the participants but respects the participants and the sites for research. Further, researchers provide reciprocity by giving or paying back those who participate in research, and they focus on the multiple-perspective stories of individuals and who tells the stories. Researchers are also sensitive to power imbalances during all facets of the research process. They respect individual differences rather than employing the traditional aggregation of categories such as men and women, or Hispanics or African Americans.

- Researchers are respectful co-constructors of knowledge. Ethical practices of the researchers recognize the importance of the subjectivity of their own lens, acknowledge the powerful position they have in the research, and admit that the participants or the co-construction of the account between the researchers and the participants are the true owners of the information collected.

- Research is reported in diverse formats and calls for societal change. The research may be presented in traditional ways, such as journal articles, or in experimental approaches, such as theater or poetry. Using an interpretive lens may also lead to the call for action and transformation—the aims of social justice—in which the qualitative project ends with distinct steps of reform and an incitement to action.

Linking Philosophy and Interpretive Frameworks in Qualitative Research

Although the philosophical assumptions are not always stated, the interpretive frameworks do convey different philosophical assumptions, and qualitative researchers need to be aware of this connection. A thoughtful chapter by Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011) makes this connection explicit. We have taken their overview of this connection and adapted it to fit the interpretive communities discussed in this chapter. As shown in Table 2.3, the philosophical assumptions of ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology take different forms given the interpretive framework used by the inquirer.

The use of information from Table 2.3 in a qualitative study would be to discuss the interpretive framework used in a project by weaving together the framework used by discussing its central tenets, how it informs the problem to a study, the research questions, the data collection and analysis, and the interpretation. A section of this discussion would also mention the philosophical assumptions (ontology, epistemology, axiology, methodology) associated with the interpretive framework. Thus, there would be two ways to discuss the interpretive framework: its nature and use in the study, and its philosophical assumptions. As we proceed ahead and examine the five qualitative approaches in this book, recognize that each one might use any of the interpretive frameworks. For example, if a grounded theory study were presented as a scientific paper, with a major emphasis on objectivity, with a focus on the theoretical model that results, without reporting biases of the researcher, and with a systematic

TABLE 2.2 ● Comparing Major Interpretive Frameworks

Interpretive Frameworks	Possible Researcher Goals	Potential Researcher Influences	Examples of Researcher Practices
Postpositivism	To discover contributors to probability within situations of cause and effect	Prior quantitative research training	Reports systematic data collection and analysis procedures followed to ensure rigor
Social constructivism	To understand the world in which they live and work	Recognition of background as shaping interpretation	Interprets participants constructions of meaning in his/her account
Transformative frameworks	To act for societal improvements	Knowledge of power and social relationships within society	Adopts an action agenda for addressing the injustices of marginalized groups
Postmodern perspectives	To change ways of thinking	Understandings of the conditions of the world today	Situates research to highlight multiplicity of perspectives
Pragmatism	To find solutions to real-world problems	Appreciation for diverse approaches to collecting and analyzing and the contexts in which research takes place	Uses the most appropriate methods for addressing the research question
Feminist theories	To conduct research that is transformative for women	Perspectives of power relationships and individuals' social position and how they impact women	Poses questions that relate to the centrality of gender in the shaping of our consciousness
Critical theory and critical race theory	To address areas of inequities and empower humans	Acknowledgment of own power, engagement in dialogues, and use of theory to interpret social actions	Designs research in such a way that transforms the underlying orders of social life
Queer theory	To convey the voices and experiences of individuals who have been suppressed	Understandings of need for thinking about sexual categories as open, fluid, and nonfixed	Engages in inquiry with a focus on exploring the myriad complexities of individual identity
Disability theories	To address the meaning of inclusion	Recognition of disability as a dimension of human difference and not as a defect	Employs a disability interpretive lens for informing the research process

TABLE 2.3 ● Interpretive Frameworks and Associated Philosophical Beliefs

Interpretive Frameworks	Ontological Beliefs (the nature of reality)	Epistemological Beliefs (how reality is known)	Axiological Beliefs (role of values)	Methodological Beliefs (approach to inquiry)
Postpositivism	A single reality exists beyond ourselves, "out there." The researcher may not be able to understand it or get to it because of lack of absolutes.	Reality can only be approximated, but it is constructed through research and statistics. Interaction with research subjects is kept to a minimum. Validity comes from peers, not participants.	The researcher's biases need to be controlled and not expressed in a study.	Scientific method and writing is used. Object of research is to create new knowledge. Method is important. Deductive methods are important, such as testing of theories, specifying important variables, and making comparisons among groups.
Social constructivism	Multiple realities are constructed through our lived experiences and interactions with others.	Reality is co-constructed between the researcher and the researched and shaped by individual experiences.	Individual values are honored and are negotiated among individuals.	More of a literary style of writing is used. Use of an inductive method of emergent ideas (through consensus) is obtained through methods such as interviewing, observing, and analyzing texts.
Transformative/ postmodern	Participation between researcher and communities or individuals is being studied. Often a subjective–objective reality emerges.	There are co-created findings with multiple ways of knowing.	There is respect for indigenous values; values need to be problematized and interrogated.	Methods consist of using collaborative processes of research, encouraging political participation, questioning of methods, and highlighting issues and concerns.
Pragmatism	Reality is what is useful, is practical, and "works."	Reality is known through using many tools of research that reflect both deductive (objective) evidence and inductive (subjective) evidence.	Values are discussed because of the way that knowledge reflects both the researchers' and the participants' views.	The research process involves both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis.

(Continued)

TABLE 2.3 ● (Continued)

Interpretive Frameworks	Ontological Beliefs (the nature of reality)	Epistemological Beliefs (how reality is known)	Axiological Beliefs (role of values)	Methodological Beliefs (approach to inquiry)
Critical, race, feminist, queer, disability	Reality is based on power and identity struggles. Privilege or oppression based on race or ethnicity, class, gender, mental abilities, sexual preference.	Reality is known through the study of social structures, freedom and oppression, power, and control. Reality can be changed through research.	Diversity of values is emphasized within the standpoint of various communities.	Start with assumptions of power and identity struggles, document them, and call for action and change.

Source: Adapted from Lincoln et al. (2011).

rendering of data analysis, a postpositivist interpretive framework would be used. On the other hand, if the intent of the qualitative narrative study was to examine a marginalized group of disabled learners with attention to their struggles for identity about prostheses that they wear, and with utmost respect for their views and values, and in the end of the study to call for changes in how the disabled group is perceived, then a strong disability interpretive framework would be in use. We could see using any of the interpretive frameworks with any of the five approaches advanced in this book.

Chapter Check-In

1. Do you understand the differences among the four major philosophical assumptions used in qualitative research: ontology (what is reality?), epistemology (how is reality known?), axiology (how are values of the research expressed?), and methodology (how is the research conducted?)?

   Examine a qualitative journal article, such as the qualitative study by Brown et al. (2006) or Healey (2014) or Jungnickel (2014). Begin with identifying the specific ways in which the four philosophical assumptions are evident in the study. List examples using Table 2.1 in this chapter as a guide.

Brown, J., Sorrell, J. H., McClaren, J., & Creswell, J. W. (2006). Waiting for a liver transplant. *Qualitative Health Research, 16*(1), 119–136. doi:10.1177/1049732305284011

Healey, G. K. (2014). Inuit family understandings of sexual health and relationships in Nunavut. *Canadian Journal of Public Health, 105*(2), e133–e137. doi:10.17269/cjph.105.4189

Jungnickel, K. (2014). Getting there ... and back: How ethnographic commuting (by bicycle) shaped a study of Australian backyard technologists. *Qualitative Research, 14*(6), 640–655. doi:10.1177/1468794113481792

2. Do you understand the differences among the associated philosophical beliefs among interpretive frameworks (postpositivism, social constructivism, transformative frameworks, postmodern perspectives, pragmatism, feminist theories, critical theory and critical race theory, queer theory, and disability theories)? Read qualitative journal articles that adopt different interpretive lens, such as Adams et al. (2014) from a queer theory framework, Brown et al. (2006) from social constructivist framework, Churchill et al. (2007) from a postpositivist framework, or Job et al. (2013) from a transformative framework. Identify how these articles differ in their interpretive frameworks. List examples using Table 2.3 in this chapter as a guide.

Adams, J., Braun, V., & McCreanor, T. (2014). "Aren't labels for pickle jars, not people?" Negotiating identity and community in talk about "being gay." *American Journal of Men's Health, 8*(6), 457–469. doi:0.1177/1557988313518800

Brown, J., Sorrell, J. H., McClaren, J., & Creswell, J. W. (2006). Waiting for a liver transplant. *Qualitative Health Research, 16*(1), 119–136. doi:10.1177/1049732305284011

Churchill, S. L., Plano Clark, V. L., Prochaska-Cue, M. K., Creswell, J. W., & Onta-Grzebik, L. (2007). How rural low-income families have fun: A grounded theory study. *Journal of Leisure Research, 39*(2), 271–294.

Job, J., Poth, C., Pei, J., Carter-Pasula, B., Brandell, D., & MacNab, J. (2013). Toward better collaboration in the education of students with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders: Voices of teachers, administrators, caregivers, and allied professionals. *Qualitative Research in Education, 2*, 38–64. doi:10.4471/qre.2013.15

3. What are the unique elements within particular interpretive frameworks? Examine qualitative journal articles that adopt different interpretive lens, such as Therberge (1997) from a feminist interpretive framework, and identify such as elements as the feminist issue(s), the directional question, the advocacy orientation of the aim of the study, the methods of data collection, and the call for action.

Therberge, N. (1997). "It's part of the game": Physicality and the production of gender in women's hockey. *Gender & Society, 11*(1), 69–87. doi:10.1177/089124397011001005

4. Do you understand the differences among interpretive frameworks when used in combinations? Examine qualitative journal articles that adopt a combination of different interpretive lenses, such as Chepp (2015) from feminist and critical race theories frameworks and from Watts and Erevelles (2004) disabilities and critical race theory frameworks. Identify examples of influenced from each interpretive framework using Table 2.2 in this chapter as a guide.

Chepp, V. (2015). Black feminist theory and the politics of irreverence: The case of women's rap. *Feminist Theory, 16*(2), 207–226. doi:10.1177/1464700115585705

Watts, I. E., & Erevelles, N. (2004). These deadly times: Reconceptualizing school violence by using critical race theory and disability studies. *American Journal of Educational Research, 41*, 271–299. doi:10.3102/00028312041002271

Summary

This chapter began with an overview of the research process so that philosophical assumptions and interpretive frameworks could be seen as positioned at the beginning of the process and informing the procedures that follow, including the selection and use of one of the five approaches in this book. Then the philosophical assumptions of ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology were discussed, as were the key question being asked for each assumption, its major characteristics, and the implication for the practice of writing a qualitative study. Furthermore, the popular interpretive frameworks (paradigm perspectives and theoretical orientations) used in qualitative research were advanced. How these interpretive frameworks are used in a qualitative study was suggested. Finally, a link was made between the philosophical assumptions and the interpretive frameworks, and a discussion followed about how to connect the two in a qualitative project.

Further Readings

The following resources are offered as foundational references for this chapter. The list should not be considered exhaustive, and readers are encouraged to seek out additional readings in the end-of-book reference list.

Brisolara, S., Seigart, D., & SenGupta, S. (2014). *Feminist evaluation and research: Theory and practice.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Sharon Brisolara, Denise Seigart, and Saumitra SenGupta bring together illustrative examples exploring the processes involved in feminist research. The authors uniquely situate feminist research within disciplines and international contexts.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.) (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Handbooks are often a logical starting place for researchers, and Norm Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln offer foundation ideas for contemporary discussions about the role of guiding philosophy behind qualitative research. Specifically, we found the chapters on feminist research by Virginia Olesen; queer theory by Ken Plummer; and transformative research by Donna Mertens, Martin Sullivan, and Hilary Stace to be noteworthy.

Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1988). Do inquiry paradigms imply inquiry methodologies? In D. M. Fetterman (Ed.), *Qualitative approaches to evaluation in education* (pp. 89–115). New York, NY: Praeger.

Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln, in offering their perspective of the relationship between paradigms and methodologies, contribute seminal work to these discussions.

Hesse-Biber, S. N. (2012). *Handbook of feminist research: Theory and praxis* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber provides a grounding in feminist research through discussions of current perspectives on its influence on social change and transformation as well as the new technologies that are influencing methodological approaches within the field.

Lovern, L. L. & Locust, C. (2013). *Native American communities on health and disability: Borderland dialogues*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lavonna Lovern and Carol Locust provide a foundational resource for researchers interested in how to begin a genuine dialogue with indigenous communities. The authors experiences are particularly noted in the sections focused on "wellness" concepts that are respectful of disability and indigeneity.

Mertens, D. M. (2009). *Transformative research and evaluation*. New York, NY: Guilford.

In this book, Donna Mertens provides a step-by-step guide to conducting research using a transformative lens in a way that clearly connects theory to practice.

Mertens, D. M. (2015). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Donna Mertens presents a brief history and then focuses on the philosophical underpinnings of four research paradigms: postpositivism, constructivist, transformative, and pragmatic. Of particular note is her useful description of the transformative paradigm including a rationale for its emergence and description of its philosophical and theoretical basis.

Mertens, D. M., Cram, F., & Chilisa, B. (Eds.) (2013). *Indigenous pathways into social research*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Through life stories of over 30 indigenous researchers from six continents representing diverse disciplines, editors Donna Mertens, Fiona Cram and Bagele Chilisa provide a powerful conduit for researchers to learn about challenges experienced and effective strategies for producing meaningful work.

Phillips, D. C., & Burbules, N. C. (2000). *Postpositivism and educational research*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Dennis Phillips and Nicholas Burbules offer an excellent description of postpositivism in practice that is a foundational read for researchers.

Slife, B. D., & Williams, R. N. (1995). *What's behind the research? Discovering hidden assumptions in the behavioral sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Brent Slife and Richard Williams explore the assumptions underpinning major theoretical approaches in the behaviorial sciences. This seminal work has been widely cited across disciplines (e.g., psychology, education) as useful for encouraging critical thinking of theories.

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Schwandt, T. A. (2003). Three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: Interpretativism, hermeneutics and social constructionism. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues* (pp. 292–331). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

In his useful comparisons, Thomas Schwandt draws both commonalities and distinctions. For example, he views a shared focus of social constructionists and interpretivists on the process by which meanings are developed, negotiated, sustained, and adapted. Yet how the theory is applied in practice highlights differences.

Tierney, W. G. (1997). *Academic outlaws: Queer theory and cultural studies in the academy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

William Tierney situates the theoretical intersection of cultural studies and queer theory in this book. He provides an important historical look backward and an interesting look forward.

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Choosing Among Five Approaches

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