



## Introduction

This book is about an adventure. One of the great challenges facing the human sciences and service professions is the choice and application of research methods that respect the uniqueness, complexity, and meanings of human experience. Qualitative research methods have made seminal contributions to psychology over the past century, employed by such eminent researchers as William James, Sigmund Freud, Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, Abraham Maslow, and Nobel Prize awardees Herbert Simon and Daniel Kahneman. Only in the most recent decades has a rich and diverse plurality of such methods become formalized and made available in the academic curriculum for training researchers. Since the 1970s, qualitative methods have had an increasing presence in education settings, in funded research, and in professional conferences and journals. This movement has been characterized as “the qualitative revolution” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Nevertheless, although textbooks and graduate courses currently introduce various approaches to students and scholars, there has been little focused and systematic comparison of the various methods past and present. Students and even seasoned researchers seeking to expand their methodological competence to include qualitative practice are often baffled by similarities and differences of such methods and may be at a loss in choosing analytic methods that are most relevant for their purposes. This volume contributes to the emerging interest in qualitative research methods by focusing on the historical background, contemporary context, concrete demonstrations, and comparisons of five leading approaches to qualitative analysis: phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry. The goal of this book is to assist novice and seasoned researchers in achieving more rigorous qualitative *praxis*, the reflective application of qualitative analyses.

## The Nature and Importance of Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative research addresses the question of “what?” Knowing *what* something is entails a conceptualization of the matter under investigation as a whole and in its various parts, the way these parts are related and organized as a whole, and how the whole is similar to and different from other things. Knowing *what something is* may also involve the conceptualization of its “how”—its process and temporal unfolding in time. Qualitative knowledge may also include an understanding of the context, the consequences/outcomes, and even the significance of what is investigated in the larger world. The construction of theories, hypothetical explanation, prediction, and measurement of a subject matter presupposes qualitative knowledge—that is, knowledge of the basic characteristics of the subject matter. Knowledge of the “what” may be implicit or explicit, uncritically assumed or carefully established, and informally or formally acquired. In the history of the sciences that concern human mental life, great attention has been devoted to the rigorous specification of procedures for measurement and quantitative analysis, and the qualitative/descriptive procedures have received far less attention. However, in and of itself, measurement tells us only *magnitude*, and even when many measurements are made with the finest instruments and rationally analyzed with the most sophisticated statistical procedures, they do not themselves provide *qualitative knowledge of what is being measured*. Therefore, a different kind of research and analysis—research about *what a subject matter is* in all its real-world complexity—is a necessary foundation and complement to quantitative research.

Qualitative knowledge is easily taken for granted. We are already familiar with “what things are” through ordinary experience in everyday life. However, important basic qualitative work has always been done in the physical sciences—for instance, in charting the stars and planets in astronomy, developing classification systems for plants in botany, describing the structure and functions of organ systems, and the stages of embryonic development in biology. Perhaps such human phenomena as learning, intelligence, emotion, the family, education, democracy, and the Cold War era are so close to us that we can theorize, measure, explain, and even sometimes successfully predict and control them without undertaking any methodical qualitative investigations of them. However, given that qualitative questions concern the structure, the process, and even the significance of such subject matter, careful, rigorous science may be necessary in order to overcome the prejudices and limitations of uncritical experience and assumptions, however well these may serve us in our everyday lives. After all, qualitative questions about the nature of phenomena such as “learning” and “intelligence,” indeed of the very nature of “human beings” themselves, continue to be matters of conflicting claims and ongoing debate. Asking good qualitative questions and using careful, self-

critical, methodical, and accountable procedures to answer them is crucial for science. Qualitative knowledge of human affairs and mental life has been a part of the human sciences since their institutionalization in the 19th century. However, the importance of research methods that produce qualitative knowledge in these disciplines has begun to become broadly accepted only in recent years. Careful procedures have been well established, justified, and made available. Important findings resulting from the use of these methods have demonstrated their value and utility, as well as their complementarity to established quantitative methods.

Although there is much to learn and to know about the design, data collection, and procedures in qualitative investigations, what is most perplexing to students and practitioners is qualitative *analysis*, which is so very different from quantitative analysis and has traditionally not been included in educational curricula. Few researchers or methodologists have had formal training and developed expertise in applying a variety of approaches to qualitative research, and few graduate institutions offer students an opportunity to learn a full spectrum of approaches to qualitative data analysis. In order to fill this gap and to facilitate a deeper understanding of a representative variety of available approaches, this book addresses the context and practice of researchers who have been immersed in distinctive, leading traditions of qualitative analysis.

## **An Adventure in Qualitative Research Methodology**

This adventure began when we, five qualitative researchers widely separated by our geography, our training, our methodologies, and our areas of study, decided to undertake a unique challenge: analyses of the same written and interview data from our respective points of view. At the outset, none of us knew where this project would lead. Much like the beginning of any qualitative research project, we were only certain of our uncertainty. What subject matter would we analyze? How would we come into possession of an interview or other forms of qualitative data? How different and how similar would our methods of analysis turn out to be? Would our analyses lead to the similar insights or different findings? Might we be confronted with irreconcilable interpretations of the data and no means of resolution? What sense would each of us make of each other's work in comparison to our own? Would we be able to discern any fundamental unity among qualitative analytic approaches? What would we learn, individually and collectively, about our topic, about the analytic practices we use, about the various possibilities of qualitative analysis, about each other, and about ourselves? How might we and our understandings of our qualitative research methodology be changed in the course of this adventure?

We represent a spectrum of prominent, contemporary approaches to scientific knowledge. Because the methods of qualitative data analysis have built on and overlap with each other, we selected relatively distinct traditions with well-formulated procedures for this protocol analysis. *Phenomenology* (represented by Frederick Wertz) is a method originally formalized in philosophy that has also been employed across the humanities, social sciences, and service professions over the last century; since the 1960s, phenomenologists have used clearly defined methods for formulating meaning-oriented, descriptive knowledge in psychology. *Grounded theory* (Kathy Charmaz), which developed in sociology in the late 1960s with an emphasis on theory building, has contributed well-delineated procedures that have been widely utilized in diverse human sciences and professions. *Discourse analysis* (Linda McMullen) is one of a family of contemporary approaches that emphasizes human language as a socially contextual performance and that brings a socially critical lens to its study of science and human life. *Narrative research* (Ruthellen Josselson) draws upon the field of literary studies as well as interdisciplinary social and intellectual movements, ranging from psychoanalysis to feminism, and emphasizes the interpretive power of stories to disclose human meaning. *Intuitive inquiry* (Rosemarie Anderson) has joined the approaches to qualitative research more recently, emerging from the study of spiritual and transformative experiences, and contributing to the growing traditions of qualitative research by formally specifying methods that incorporate researchers' intuitive, emotional, and personal capacities, which have long been informally employed in scientific analyses and theorizing, in order to serve psychology's aspirations to foster personal and cultural transformation. These five approaches to qualitative analysis can be utilized across a broad spectrum of subject matters and with various kinds of data, including written descriptions, interviews, focus groups, and other human expressions. They can be combined with each other and used in a variety of research projects, including basic science, hermeneutics, heuristics, and ethnography; action, participatory, and emancipatory research; and clinical, evaluation, and case study research.

We are focusing on the analysis phase of qualitative research because the differences among various approaches can be best discerned there. Qualitative analyses are not the mere application of technical procedures; they are not simply additional tools for the researcher's toolbox. When properly practiced, such analyses require a unique qualitative stance and worldview. Therefore, our goal in this book is to provide a broad knowledge base that can serve as the foundation for understanding and employing the typical procedures used in our five specific approaches. In order to facilitate more in-depth understanding, which requires further reading, we provide references to the larger body of literature on qualitative methods and methodology, including the specific literatures of our five analytic approaches. We aim to provide readers with a concrete, detailed, and intimate experience as they

enter the qualitative movement by following each of us through our analytic practices. We also hope to contribute original insights into how these different approaches relate to historically exemplary qualitative research and how they compare with each other, in order to promote a better understanding of their common features as well as their distinctive purposes and strengths. To these ends, each of us has confronted and delved into a broad spectrum of problems and challenges facing contemporary qualitative researchers, ranging from the philosophical underpinnings of our work to scientific issues of validity and ethical conundrums involved in the protection of human participants in highly personal research. We also place considerable emphasis on the role, style, and subjectivity of the individual researcher and offer reflexive examinations of our own personal presences in the process of analysis. Consequently, our adventure has not merely reiterated well-traveled paths. We have also made some exciting original advances into past, present, and future horizons of the qualitative movement.

All five of us have typically sought general knowledge through our research. The current project is unusual for us in that its main focus is the analysis using the data of only a single participant. We originally undertook this approach for demonstration purposes, in order to allow readers access to the nuts and bolts of our analytic practices with concrete material. However, in assuming the ethical responsibility involved in protecting the rights, preserving the well-being, and caring for the interests of our research participants, we entered into a relationship with the primary research participant and became attentive to her responses to this project. Although initially a subtext, this relationship inevitably became a significant part of our project that we share explicitly because of the general importance of the ethical and methodological issues it entails.

Norms regarding personal privacy are shifting in our culture, as reflected in the popularity of websites such as Facebook, which displays considerable personal information. Norms regarding the roles of research participants are also shifting in our science. The impact of research on participants and participants' experiences of research are provoking ethical and scientific debate. The boundaries between scientist and nonscientist have been shaken, problematized, and questioned. The model adapted from the physical sciences, in which the researcher is the subject and the participant is the object, has been viewed as inappropriate for the human sciences. Commentators, critics, and researchers themselves are increasingly calling on researchers to view participants as persons whose interests, methods of understanding, critical potential, and outcomes are acknowledged and valued within science. Scientists are also becoming increasingly sensitive to the political and ethical implications of the inequalities of power and privilege. Because the participant's role in research has become an important topic in contemporary research and has posed ambiguous and complex issues for research involving highly personal

material, we explore and critically reflect on the variety and meanings of our research participant's responses to our analyses. We have found that even when researchers are seeking general knowledge and serving purposes other than those of the research participants, their analyses may have significant impact that calls for understanding and ethical responsibility on the part of scientists.

## The Road Traveled

Our first difficulty was selecting an acceptable data set for this project. This decision was difficult because data do not just turn up on our doorstep out of nowhere. Each qualitative tradition and each individual researcher has ways of defining a research topic, critically engaging the literature on that topic, identifying significant research problems, designing an entire study, and collecting the data that will best serve the specific knowledge aims. Data analysis does not take place in a vacuum, or in a standard setting across approaches, but in the particular context of a research project. Therefore, adopting common material for analysis in this project involved some contrivance and artificiality. If we were conducting research in our natural contexts, we would design our studies in various ways and utilize different data. We discussed whether there were data that we could commonly use for demonstration and comparison purposes, and after a few weeks of dialogue, were able to overcome reservations and agree on common material for our analyses.

The primary data selected for this work are a stirring, in-depth written description and interview that emerged in a graduate class on qualitative research methods at Fordham University. The students in the class had decided to study "human resilience in the face of trauma" (what they called "misfortune"), and each student wrote a description of an example from their own personal lives, followed by interviews with each other. As primary data for the present project, we decided to use a written description and student-conducted interview with a young woman student whom we called "Teresa." Nineteen years old at the time of her "misfortune," Teresa was a student at a music conservatory, training to be an opera singer, when she developed cancer of the thyroid, which threatened her voice and career. As the cancer spread to her brain, she entered into a struggle for her life and lost much of what was of value to her. In a courageous effort to live as fully as possible, she profoundly altered and expanded her life.

We researchers were aware of the limitations of adopting these texts for our analyses. The interview was brief; the interviewer was a novice; only one participant's data would form the primary basis for analysis. Nevertheless, we accepted these limits because the richness of this material would enable us to demonstrate our analytic practices with sufficient authenticity to allow

meaningful results and comparisons. In order to enable researchers to overcome the limits of a single participant's data set and to demonstrate their comparative analytic procedures, we chose a second written description and interview from the same class with another student whom we called "Gail." As a former Division I National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) gymnast, Gail had suffered a traumatic injury in a fall from the uneven bars. Her data provided the researchers with an opportunity to work with more than one example of the subject matter if they so chose. Although we researchers do not ordinarily limit ourselves to one or two sets of data in our analyses, we were satisfied that these two examples would allow us to demonstrate our approaches for our present purposes.

This project developed in phases over 3 years. Each phase was followed by presentations at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (APA), including symposia in the main program followed by formal discussion sessions in the Hospitality Suite of APA's Society for Humanistic Psychology. In the first phase, five of the coauthors analyzed the common data and presented accounts of their approaches, including their backgrounds, philosophies, and histories; their analytic procedures; and their findings in the analysis of Teresa's (and, in some cases, Gail's) descriptions and interviews at the APA convention in 2007. The researchers and those attending the presentations found the similarities and differences in these analyses to be fascinating, raising a host of previously unaddressed questions about qualitative research. Each researcher was surprised by the other analyses, which gave each of us a unique opportunity to explore and understand how the various approaches compare with, and relate to, each other. The task of the second phase was for each researcher to study the other four approaches and to compare them with specific references to his or her work and findings on the common data.

### **The Involvement of the Research Participant**

Our comparisons of methods and findings provoked much thought and discussion at the APA convention in 2008. As we were musing over the discrepancies among the five analyses, one attendee suggested, "Have you asked Teresa [the participant] what *she* thinks of these analyses?" Although we had offered to share the results of our analyses with both research participants, we had not considered asking them for their responses. As qualitative researchers, we were accustomed to asking our participants to review and assess the accuracy of their interview transcripts as well as to delete any personal content that they did not want in print. Apart from these standard practices, the five of us researchers had not typically engaged our research participants in an extensive conversation about the results of our research. Aware that many



qualitative researchers are involving participants in the various phases of the research, we decided to expand the scope of this project by inviting Teresa to respond to our analyses and to contribute a chapter to the present book as our sixth coauthor. Still a graduate student in psychology, she gladly accepted the invitation to join us as a collaborator and to write about her experiences participating in this research project, including her responses to our analyses.

After reading our material and in drafting her chapter, Teresa requested that we use her name, which would disclose her identity in our publication. We were concerned that she would thereby lose the protection of privacy that had been established by our rigorously upheld confidentiality. By inviting a research participant to read our analyses of her own words and respond to them, we anticipated a number of ethical challenges and complexities. We decided to address the ethical dilemmas of collaborative partnerships with research participants in our 2009 APA symposium and discussion. We teamed up with two researchers and ethicists, Professors Donna Mertens and Linda Silka, to explore the issues and options more deeply. In preparation, we (the original five) researchers discussed a range of ethical issues, centering on questions of anonymity, confidentiality, and the protection of privacy. We found ourselves facing a new set of concerns, such as the potential risks of making public our participant's medical history, which would then be available to future potential employers and insurers. We were concerned about the privacy not only of our participant but of others to whom she referred in her interview, such as her spouse, her parents, her voice teacher, and the physicians who had initially misdiagnosed her medical condition. We shared these concerns with the participant herself, who explored the issues we raised and steadfastly continued to request the use of her name. After lengthy and intense discussion, we arrived at a collective resolution. Given the unusual nature of this project, especially the participant's new role as a coauthor, we decided to continue to use the pseudonym of Teresa in the data, analyses, and comparisons contained in the present volume and to use her real name, Emily (Emalinda) McSpadden, as coauthor of the book and author of her chapter. Continuing to use the pseudonym *Teresa* pays respect to the important principle of confidentiality and marks the initial conditions under which the project and analyses were conducted. Using her real name acknowledges Emily McSpadden's particular role as a collaborator and coauthor of this volume. We hope readers understand how the unique conditions of this project have led us to this unusual arrangement.

The final phase of our work concerned our response to Emily's chapter, in which she expressed her responses to our analyses. We focused on and discussed some of the difficult ethical and scientific challenges posed by a collaborative partnership with a research participant and by the participant's responses to the analysis of her experience. In initially inviting our research



participant to respond to our analyses, we deliberately did not direct or constrain her in any way and encouraged her to respond freely. Emily's responses were many and varied. She was grateful in some ways for how the researchers approached her story. She was at times taken aback, and yet also intrigued, by the methods used. She found some analyses to be in tune with her own self-understanding, and at times she felt embarrassed and disconcerted. She also objected to the apparent implications of some analyses, questioning their "accuracy." Our analyses sometimes confirmed and sometimes contradicted her view of herself. The researchers were all struck by the integrity, passion, and honesty with which Emily responded. They, too, had a variety of responses in turn, ranging from relief to fascination, to feeling misunderstood and underappreciated. These reactions posed a host of questions about the purpose of Emily's chapter, how it would be understood by readers, and about the power relationship between researchers and participant. Who has interpretive authority and on what basis?

The researchers had conflicting impulses as to how to proceed. Some felt strongly that Emily's responses should be presented as they were initially written. All agreed that Emily's responses were to be respected, protected, and presented here; the prospect of censoring our participant's responses to our analyses was abhorrent. And yet the researchers were concerned that, as a student and nonexpert in qualitative methods, Emily's responses might contain misunderstandings and consequently mislead readers about the analytic approaches. After all, Emily had not had the benefit of years of studying qualitative methods and the extensive process of collaboration and mutual correction that the researchers had with each other in writing their responses to each others' work. Might our inclusion of Emily's chapter inadvertently lead readers to bestow an interpretive privilege and authority on research participants that none of us five researchers endorses? None of us researchers believes that research participants are a final court of appeal in establishing the scientific value of procedures and the legitimacy of research findings. In comparing and responding to each others' analyses, at times we struggled to abstain from critique and to modify our statements in response to corrections by the other researchers, given their expertise. Should the participant's responses not be held to the same standards and process of revision? Who would have the final say in any disagreements that ensued?

In facing these ethical and scientific dilemmas, we chose a middle way—that of open, transparent, and respectful conversation. We thereby shed light on our differences of perspective, including those of researcher and research participant. We present Emily's initial, spontaneous responses to our analyses as originally written, and we later explicitly address the complex net of thorny issues raised by conflicting interpretations when participants are allowed to speak back to researchers in collaborative partnerships. This conversation between researchers and participant allowed us to better understand the

complexities of power, privilege, ownership, interpretive authority, and validity in human scientific research.

## The Organization and Uses of the Text

This text was written for student, novice, and seasoned professional qualitative researchers. The volume is organized in three parts. The first part tells the story of qualitative research in psychology, beginning with some of the greatest pioneering works and concluding with the contemporary movement and the typical organization of the qualitative research project. The second part and centerpiece of the volume presents Teresa's written description and subsequent interview about her struggle with cancer and accounts of each of the five approaches to qualitative analysis featuring the application to Teresa's story of traumatic loss. The third part of the volume addresses the contemporary problems of pluralism by providing a detailed comparison of the five approaches to analysis, the participant's response to the analyses, and an examination of such timely issues as research ethics, the meaning of the participant's responses to analysis, and specifications of the common fundamentals and the distinctive features of five qualitative traditions.

The first chapter introduces the practice of qualitative research through an examination of noteworthy examples of its virtuoso practice in the history of psychology. After introducing the often unacknowledged wealth of seminal qualitative research in psychology, the work of master practitioners Sigmund Freud, William James, Abraham Maslow, and Lawrence Kohlberg reveals a goldmine of best practices. The methods and the knowledge developed by these pioneers, who address "the what" of psychopathology, dreams, religious experience, the healthy personality, human beings' best experiences, and the development of moral reasoning, serve as models and reference points throughout this volume. In this chapter we also discuss Gordon Allport's critical call for a formal methodology and practice norms for qualitative research, which anticipates the contemporary movement.

Chapter 2 focuses on the work of methodologists who have elevated qualitative analytic practice to praxis and have established various traditions of research by reflecting on their scientific basis and norms and formally specifying analytic practices to be used by researchers throughout the human sciences. Chapter 3 traces the recent appropriation and spread of growing knowledge and applications of qualitative analyses, including a focus on issues that most concern contemporary qualitative researchers and a summary of the problems and organization of the typical qualitative research project today.

Chapter 4 presents Teresa's verbatim written description and interview, providing readers with access to the raw data that the five researchers used in their analyses. The appendix includes the written description and interview

offered by Gail, the elite gymnast who suffered and overcame a serious injury as a result of her athletic accident. Gail's texts, utilized in three of the five analyses that follow, also provide additional data for reference and use by readers, who can thereby apply the various analytic approaches detailed in this book to these data in their own, fuller way. Chapters 5–9 focus on the five analytic traditions and analyses of Teresa's texts (including some analyses of Gail's texts), in turn. Each chapter offers an overview of the history, philosophy, conceptual underpinnings, and procedures of the specified approach as well as its application to Teresa's texts.

Chapter 10 contains explicit comparisons of the five approaches to qualitative analysis, as viewed through the lenses of each of the five traditions. These comparisons bring to light the unique attractions, commonalities, distinctive features, strengths, and relevant applications of each approach. Chapter 11 includes Emily's responses to the analyses. The final chapter, Chapter 12, concludes with an examination of the main themes of the volume: ethics, the involvement of the participant in research, and methodological insights concerning the foundations of qualitative research and the distinctive features of its various traditions. Here we define the common fundaments of qualitative analysis that are shared by diverse practitioners, including the five traditions that are featured in this book and the virtuoso practitioners whose past works have had great impact. This generic foundation of qualitative analysis may be useful as a guide for researchers who do not affiliate with any single tradition. We also identify the options and unique advantages afforded by the five featured methodological traditions available among the multiple contemporary approaches to qualitative human science. The two raw data sets, multiple methods, and the involvement of the research participant herself, are elaborated in order to provide students and researchers with greater understanding of the achievements and challenges of the growing field of qualitative research.

This volume is intended to inform and provoke thought among qualitative researchers who study human experience. It also serves as an introduction to the "nuts and bolts" of qualitative research, addressing not merely the *why* and the *what*, but also the *how* of qualitative methods. We hope that our sharing of the history, movement, and contemporary applications of detailed analysis of lived experience (i.e., experience as it concretely and spontaneously takes place in actual human life)<sup>1</sup> is of interest to the full range of disciplines concerned with human existence. The psychological research and analytic methods featured in this text can be fruitfully extended by researchers working in such disciplines as anthropology, sociology, history, political sciences, and economics as well as in such interdisciplinary and professional fields as health, education, social service, business, counseling, and women's studies. This book is intended for independent investigators and students at graduate and advanced undergraduate levels in general courses on research

methodology and in specific courses on qualitative research in human science disciplines. It can complement textbooks on quantitative methods and on qualitative methods. This book can also be used in courses on qualitative research methods in conjunction with readings from journal articles and other books that address such issues as data collection strategies and report writing. The inclusion of complete written and interview data sets from two participants allows readers to conduct their own original analyses, using the approaches detailed in this volume and others, in order to learn, explore, and compare variants of qualitative analysis.

### Note

1. The term *lived experience*, frequently used by qualitative researchers, has been drawn from the continental tradition of the humanities and human sciences, as a translation of the German word *Erlebnis*. For a wonderfully informative exposition of the historical origins, meaning, usage, and complex concept of this term, see Gadamer (1960/1985, pp. 55–63). The word *Erlebnis* became common only in the 1870s as a derivation of the older word *Erleben*, which often appeared in the age of Goethe. The word *Erlebnis* began to be used in biographical writings in which it referred to *immediate* experience, in contrast to conceptual knowledge and interpretation, and connoted the weight and consequence and *temporal significance* of experience. The concept of *lived experience*, in contrast to the abstractions of experience in theory (e.g., “sensation”) and measurement (e.g., “absolute threshold”), has included its inherent teleology, productivity, relationality, and above all, meaningfulness in the context of the person’s larger life.

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