

# INTRODUCTION: EXPLORATIONS AND DISCOVERIES

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Social scientists who utilize qualitative research move toward the twenty-first century in many respects pondering questions that bedeviled our methodological ancestors at the turn of the twentieth century. What should our stance be vis-à-vis those whom we study? How do we know what we observe is “true?” What is the best means to present what we have discovered to our readers? Who should be our readers?

Although such questions may still be with us—like a chronic backache whose pain may subside at times but never go away—the manner in which we think about such questions has changed, and our tentative responses are also different. We once thought that the “native’s” world was simple and understandable. Our role was to record what we saw and develop findings so that they would contribute to Western science. The relationship between native and researcher was unequal, in large part because we knew more than they did—we understood their world, but they did not understand ours. And we presented our work to our confreres at conferences, journals, and books in a prose laden with a technical vocabulary that demonstrated our sophistication with scientific terms and an ability to add to the scientific stock of knowledge.

Today, a culture of doubt permeates academic work in the social sciences. We are no longer sure if it is either possible or desirable (read ethical) to “leave no footprints” when we undertake a study of a group of people. Words such as “reliability,” “validity,” and “trustworthiness” have become contested terms in a postmodern world, and researchers have sought to reinscribe them with meanings that would have been unheard of two generations ago. Validity, for example, in part refers to how we are able to improve the lives of those we study (Lather, 1986); trustworthiness pertains to checking with our interviewees to see if they agree with what we have written and concur on our representations of them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). How we present our work, and to whom, is also more up for grabs today than at any other time in this century.

All of these points are obviously interrelated. If those whom we study are to be co-participants in the development of our findings, then the manner in which “we” study “them” will be different from the individual who thinks of him or herself as a clinician trying to develop understandings akin to the scientist in a laboratory. The desire to create change, to lessen oppression, or to assist in the development of a more equitable world sets up a different research dynamic from that of the disengaged academic whose main purpose is to add to the stock of theoretical knowledge. And if we are to raise such issues about the research process, then the manner in which we present data, and to whom, also comes under renewed scrutiny. It is this last point that is the focus of this book. All of the authors begin with a basic premise: if we partake in the current debate that circles around postmodernists’ interpretation of notions such as “reality” and “identity,” then the development of qualitative texts in the social sciences demand dramatic new reconfiguration, and to a large extent, new audiences. Parenthetically, we are not saying that everything that has gone before us is false, or that the views of authors a generation ago, or of our colleagues today, are wrong. Times change, different groups have different interpretations, and even if the questions may not change, our take on how we think about those questions has afforded us a uniquely different way to situate ourselves within the research experience. We welcome constructive dialogue.

Our consistent focus here, however—such that anyone can be consistent who subscribes to postmodernism—is to discuss the implications for representational practices if we subscribe to what has come to be called “postmodernism.” The book is not intended as a primer on postmodernism, and as we have discovered, as authors, we have significant disagreements with one another about the basic tenets of postmodernism. Some of us call on European strands of postmodernism and others use a feminist version; some think that postmodernism is an explicit call for political change, and others focus on the theoretical implications of postmodernism. Nevertheless, we all agree that the manner in which we present data, how we construct the “author” and the “reader,” demand serious investigation in ways that would have been unheard of fifty years ago.

There are other major agreements that are shared between us, however. The agreements that we share run as explicit and implicit themes through each of chapters in this volume. We are bound first by the commitment to “break the science habit,” as Lincoln’s chapter calls it. We are sober resisters to what Pinar labels here the “tyranny of science,” the norming and normalization of structuralism, the imprisoning strictures of science that create silences. Thus, throughout the chapters,

readers will see warnings against textual adherence to conventional mandates for what science demands. Or they will see deep analyses of the "fictions" that science can create from perspectival and textual/rhetorical demands. Or they will see the effects of experiments that try to break those chains.

We are also bound by another commitment, this one ideological. While some of us are critical theorists, some of us Marxist in orientation, others feminist, our ideological commitment supersedes each of those ideological and methodological lenses. We are bound by what Tierney calls the "ideology of doubt." This ideology of doubt is explicated by Laurel Richardson, in an earlier work (1994):

The core of postmodernism is the doubt that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as the "right" or the privileged form of authoritative knowledge. Postmodernism suspects all truth claims of masking and serving particular interests in local, cultural and political struggles. . . .

The postmodernist context of doubt distrusts all methods equally. No method has a privileged status. The superiority of "science" over "literature"—or, from another vantage point, "literature" over "science"—is challenged. (pp. 517–7)

Thus, we are all suspicious. We are suspicious of those who tell us they have the only methods appropriate for conducting scientific inquiry. We are suspicious of those who tell us they have the final theories on why the world is as it is. We are especially suspicious of discourses that, without thoughtful analytic deconstructing, invisibly shape the ideas which we express, limit the views of reality with which we grapple, and silence those who are not privy to our private languages. And we are suspicious of "genre wars," the particular border skirmishes of academic provinces that declare some traditions important, powerful, legitimate, while others are ideologically impoverished.

We are also bound as authors by a commitment to intertwine the personal with the professional, because we understood "the personal was political," and "the professional was personal" long before standpoint epistemology was fully explicated. Carolyn Ellis's intensely personal writing experiment, which both comments upon and completes part I, shows us how one woman comes to grips with the intersection of the personal and the professional. Patti Lather's work on women with HIV/AIDS encounters the contradictions of the personal, the political,

and the professional again in part II. Peter McLaren writes of his realization of the self as flaneur—as loungeur, loafer, stroller in urban spaces sees himself becoming, as we all do to some extent, the metropolitan voyeur, the observer who has been caught up in cosmopolitan rituals of his own. His reconfiguration of space, monuments, time, and urban danger signal both the precarious, “saturated” self, and the postmodern sense of terror that invariably accompanies doubt.

We agree, too, that to claim “reality” is a “contested terrain” is to understate the case. It is a battleground where armies of the personal, the political, the cultural, the linguistic, the racial, the gendered, the classes collide in symbolic combat. It is a fractured landscape of struggle and resistance, of border crossings of all description, where margins meet the center, where no human escapes without wounds, where engagements and withdrawals mark the day from dawn to nightfall, where doubt pervades every encounter.

Finally, we are also joined by Schwandt’s explication of the ethical dilemma of finding a “responsible way to compose a text that re-presents the postmodern wisdom” of how and who we are. Whether that text is a drama (as in Denzin’s call for performance and storytelling), or whether it is a disavowal of the single, career-making monograph in favor of multiple texts aiming to engage multiple audiences, seeking to persuade multiple readers/players, we are all seeking forms and frames which convey our narratives with immediacy and with recognition. We are, as chapter authors, about a search for an ethical way to “be,” in the personal/professional nexus that shape our lives, and in the texts we seek to present and re-present.

Our task here, and the purpose of this book is to focus specifically on authorial representations of contested reality in qualitative research. As we shall discuss, in general, the manner in which qualitative social scientists have presented the voice of the author/narrator and “subjects” has been remarkably similar. That is, even when one looks across theoretical frameworks, genres, and traditions in qualitative research, there is more similarity than diversity with regard to how data have been presented. Accordingly, our objectives in this book are twofold:

1. To provide a critique of how authors use voice in their research, and
2. To suggest ways to develop experimental voices that expand the range of narrative strategies.

We have divided the book in two. Part I maps out the conceptual terrain and outlines the issues that confront researchers as they develop their

texts. Part II suggests and demonstrates possible strategies we might employ if we take seriously the points made in the first part. We conclude both parts with critiques of the points that have been made.

In chapter 1 Don Polkinghorne suggests that the traditional authorial role of the logician or debater should be dropped and the voice of the storyteller assumed. When the author takes such a role, suggests Polkinghorne, the research act takes on an entirely different light. "Subjects" become actors in a research narrative. The researcher's removed, objective stance is changed as the researcher also becomes an actor in the text. And most importantly, the understanding of the nature of knowledge is dramatically reinterpreted so that knowledge statements are no longer considered to be statements that mirror reality; instead, they become constructions or "maps" of reality. In essence, data are created, rather than discovered, and the reader becomes aware of the creation through the textual strategy employed by the author.

Tierney continues this strain of thought in chapter 2 by way of an analysis of how authors have presented qualitative research articles. He pays particular attention to two aspects of a text: (1) how the author fits within the text, and (2) the temporal structure of the text. He suggests that the authorial voice generally has been presented in one of three ways: as an omniscient narrator, as an interviewer, or as a first-person narrator within the story. Textual time has been presented in four manners: in the present tense or the past tense, and either in linear or disjunctive fashion. Tierney suggests what we might do to expand the narrative strategies of the text and raises issues of import pertaining to how we educate future scholars, what this means for scholarly journals, and how our relationships with those whom we study of necessity will change.

In chapter 3 Yvonna Lincoln dissects the textual implications for the postmodernist credo that all texts are partial, gender-specific, local, and historically and culturally situated. She suggests that the partial nature of texts, coupled with the variety of identities that any piece of fieldwork might elicit, provide opportunities for authors to explore the possibilities of multiple texts directed toward multiple readers. Texts may attract criticism, unease, and discomfort because they stand as sole testaments to a piece of ethnographic work. Multiple texts, directed toward the research, policy, social change efforts, or public intellectual needs of various audiences may better represent both the complexity of the lives we study, and the lives we lead as academics and private persons, in and out of the research contexts. Multiple texts may also better address the issues of temporality that Tierney raises, because they necessarily portray the products of an ethical reflexivity: the changing self

over time, the maturing comprehension of our contexts, the deepening awareness of hidden social structures and power relations.

Joe Kincheloe suggests in chapter 4 that one problem with our texts is their inability to suggest or prompt action. They are, in the sense of realist criticism, "fictions," and they are, in the sense of action, "formulas." Our texts fail on two counts: both as true accounts in that they are partial, and as explications of how we might enact a more just world, because they imply a disinterested spectator on alien worlds. Kincheloe poses the possibility that critical theory, married to contructivism, might serve authors, texts, and readers alike in discovering the dynamics of power in shaping representations of the worlds we study and display.

He posits critical self-reflection as a form of analytic mirror wherein the text (in interaction with the self) begins to reveal macro and micro power dynamics. Uncovering the intersections of macro and micro power accomplishes a kind of "power archaeology"—a sifting of the colonies of consciousness until realization and understanding occur. Texts that act to re-present in ways that uncover, sift, and assemble evidence on power structures clearly make meaningful action more possible. Authors have choices about their texts; re-presentation can remain fictional and formulaic, or it can uncover the ancient sites of colonization and domination.

In chapter 5 Bill Pinar argues that reason is a regime imposed on the deepest symbolic structures of Western civilization. Imposition of this regime into the furthest corners of our social lives—education, relations of power, gender and sexual identities, and science—has created the divided self. The dissociated, divided, abstracted/distracted cognitive self, separated from its own body, can only cast the nonreasoning self as "other." This Cartesian creation perpetuates othering at the expense of not only one's own body, but at the expense of women, children, homosexuals, anyone at the margins. Pinar concludes that the heritage of Newtonian and Cartesian cosmologies of knowability are themselves forms of symbolic and discursive prisons, limiting our visions of the possible, colonizing not only countries but also our bodies, sustaining a white patriarchy even as the voices of the others claim recognition from outside the center.

Carolyn Ellis offers a summary of the first part in chapter 6 by arguing that the crisis of representation that the authors speak about challenges the most venerable notions of what we have come to think of as scientific truth and knowledge. By way of an experimental text, Ellis raises questions about authorial voice, academic discourse, and the relationship between fiction/formula, power/reason. In essence, Ellis cri-

tiques the chapters in part I by using the methods, techniques, and discourses that the authors themselves have developed.

Part II opens with a chapter by Peter McLaren, who argues that the ethnographer has a role in a postmodern world uniquely different from his or her brethren of the past. McLaren sees ethnographers as change agents who seek to create the conditions for the empowerment of those who are voiceless and silenced. At the same time, McLaren argues that the ethnographer is undergoing a crisis of representation within and outside of the academy and within and outside of the self. Writing in the style that we call for here, argues, McLaren, demands risks that provoke reflexivity, which in turn requires the author to become a postmodern flaneur.

In chapter 8 Norman Denzin takes up a vision of text as performance. As qualitative researchers expand the ranges of their voices an accompanying revision is likely to occur in our perspectives of what a text is. Denzin proposes that a powerful form of text builds on theater. One reader can interact with a book in a very private way. Even multiple readers can be unaware of those with whom they share a text. Theater—performed drama with live audiences—broadens the social tapestry in such a way that multiple “readers” interpret, interact with, and internalize a vivid, lived, shared text. Denzin suggest that the possibilities for reconnecting inquiry to the very human act of storytelling coalesces in performance texts.

Erica McWilliam suggest in chapter 9 that academic writers and teachers cannot get away from the issue of authority, but they can fundamentally reconfigure relationships. McWilliam delineates the academic strategies employed to utilize power, and outlines how academic rules seek to privilege some and silence others. She then moves into a discussion about how one might break the rules, and in doing so change readers’ views of what constitutes an academic text. McWilliam pays particular attention to those involved in the teaching of academic texts—dissertation advisors.

In the next chapter Patti Lather delineates textual practices in an interview study of women living with HIV/AIDS. In a multilayered weaving of method, the politics of interpretation, data, analysis, and text, her chapter is a text that fosters brooding about the issues involved in telling other people’s stories and living in the shadow places of history as loss. She analyzes textual decisions that create a mosaic text that is designed to interrupt the reductiveness of the restricted economies of representation that characterize mainstream social science.

In the penultimate chapter, Greg Tanaka displays one of the possible textual strategies for creating multiple voices in a variety of ranges

alongside each other. A vivid and lyrical case alongside, although not totally in tandem with, an exploration of fictional poetics, provides a textual counterpoint like a painful, but very real, conversation between new lovers. The technical placement of text provides a sense of the halting, tentative quality of a dialogue moving between registers. Greg's text is a visual re-presentation of the multitonal attempt to find a common set of meanings, a language shared. It is, too, a stark demonstration of the ways in which individuals construct very different worlds from the same or related contexts. In Greg's work, the search is for a language of race and equality. In other texts, the textual poetics might represent a struggle to recover voice, a demand for identity, a body-blow delivered in a broken-field run from the margins. Explorations of many struggles—men/women, gay/straight, liberal/conservative—might be explored via graphic experiments in text that display the ragged, hoarse attempts to tell our stories, no matter how partial our personal truths.

In the concluding chapter Thomas Schwandt summarizes what the authors have attempted. He then posits challenges that await us beyond the text. He points out the nature of interpretation in a post-postmodern world and raises questions about the implications for developing "wisdom" about the myriad problems that confront.

All books are explorations of one sort or another; like ships, some have a successful voyage and others sink to the ocean's floor. Perhaps a text is fatally flawed and of little use, or perhaps it charts new waters. Given the focus of the text, we are careful about how we define our own exploration and the "new" waters. Columbus may have "discovered" the New World for Europeans, for example, but he certainly made no discovery for those first Americans who lived in the Americas. Our understandings are contingent and contextually based. Nevertheless, we intend for this book to move those of us who do qualitative research into representational areas that are often ignored or overlooked. Indeed, there are at least four issues that the book indirectly takes up that we hope gathers momentum in the next few years.

As authors, some of us have noted that there is no small amount of postmodern irony where in a text that occasionally argues for greater accessibility, a chapter may be quite laden with dense and difficult language. As we noted above, we are not arguing any doctrinaire credo that says all texts must be one way or another. We also are not suggesting that texts should be "dumbed down" for readers. To advocate for broader representational practices surely should not imply that scholarly texts in a traditional fashion should be disdained. Such a suggestion is both anti-intellectual and insulting to readers—as if they are unable to read difficult texts. At the same time, we are suggesting that not all



texts need to be written for similar academic audiences, or even indeed solely for an academic audience. Thus, our first recommendation is that we hope to see more texts created for a broader range of readers.

Our second observation is directly tied to the issue of accessibility. Again, a few chapter authors have noted that some of us argue for experimentation in writing in quite standard fashion. Except for Tanaka's and Lather's chapters, in many respects this is a book about experimental writing rather than a book of experimental texts. Again, we made such a decision with the assumption that we first needed to lay out the conceptual issues and then get on with the experiments themselves. We hope, then, that the readers and ourselves are moved to experiment with new forms of data presentation. Lather offers technological ways to disrupt the text so that it becomes multivocal and Tanaka provides an example of how this might be done; Tierney suggests temporal and narrative strategies, and Denzin writes about performance. All of these are initial attempts to move one's creative energies toward experimentation. Obviously, other possibilities exist.

Our third and fourth points pertain to what this text has not discussed. On the one hand, we have discussed only representational practices that relate to writing. On the other hand, we have authors who are at the pinnacles of their careers; by and large the authors present a cohesive view of what we mean by experimentation.

It has become commonplace to point out the revolution that is occurring as the "information superhighway" is built. In small ways, we have used the highway—e-mail to one another about chapters, trading diskettes back and forth—but the book has not investigated radically different representational practices—film, video, and the like. We made a decision to focus on the written text so that the reader might get as wide a spectrum of opinions about it as possible. But by our focus, we have not meant to exclude the important advances that are taking place on the screen. If this book jars the reader into thinking about alternative venues for his or her work so that a text turns into a cinematic document, we welcome it. Indeed, a book of the kind that we have attempted here that speaks about cinematic and technological representations would be most helpful for those of us who accept that different representational practices are needed, but are unsure what that means in media other than the written text.

And finally, we are painfully aware of the need for an expansion of those of us who speak and write about representational practices. To be sure, the authors of this book are not xeroxes of one another. We have a mix of men and women, for example, and some of us are gay and some are straight. Such that it matters, some teach at public institutions and

others work at private universities. Some of us are young, and some are old(er). (Tierney likes to remind us that he is forty-four, and Lincoln likes to tell us it's none of our business how young she is.) But by and large, this is a text created by white, tenured, academics.

We make no apologies for authors who are significant voices about a topic such as representation. Nevertheless, this is a topic that demands voices who will move us well beyond the realm of issues that we take up here. Off and on, in our discussions about these issues, some of us have raised the perils that we are suggesting for younger scholars. An untenured assistant professor, for example, obviously will find it easier to publish an article written in a standard format than one that is a performance text or a short story. Our hope is that our voices have at least helped cut a path that so that others are able to create their own trails and venues. If representation is the central concern in the text, then obviously we are hopeful that a much wider group of scholars—academic and nonacademic, older and younger, Anglo, Asian, African American, Native American, Hispanic, and the like—take up these concerns and translate them in their own unique ways. Who we are changes what we write about and how we write. Simply stated, if the academy is to change, if our views of reality are to be more inclusive, then we need a broader representation of authorial voices as we approach the twenty-first century. Thus, we offer here an argument or experimental representational practices that may well not enable us to discover new lands—as if they are out there, waiting to be found—but instead, help us to create new ways to see the world, and in doing so, broaden who we mean by “us.”

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