

Chapter 1

Author / Authority

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides an essential building block for this book, as it elucidates the philosophical foundations of the interpretivist and positivist paradigms that beget the qualitative and quantitative methodologies. It examines the historical beginnings of qualitative research and focuses on the following issues: a) location of the researcher and its effects on authorship, b) power dynamics with native researchers, c) researching sensitive topics, d) balance of power, and e) citation practices in interpretive inquiry. The aim of this chapter is to help situate the author to be more reflexive about his or her research.

INTRODUCTION

The original meaning of author is master or leader (T. Hoad (Ed.), 2010). The word authority, meaning the ability to ensure obedience, is etymologically derived from the word author (T. Hoad (Ed.), 2010). Whether one is a qualitative or a quantitative researcher and writer, the author of the text has authority over issues such as what is said, how it is said and how the subject is represented. The issue of authority is especially important in the field of qualitative research because the researcher is the means of exploration of the questions, and has the authority to make decisions about designing the research as well as collecting data, interpreting it and writing the results to present to the world.

This chapter delves into the issues of authority, location, and representation in research with a specific focus on qualitative research.

The purpose of this book is to provide a background to human inquiry, analyze how it has evolved and address newer innovative methods with the aim that those who use this book will adopt a multi method research design. This chapter will provide an essential building block for the reader as it elucidates the philosophical foundations of qualitative and quantitative research, examines the historical origins of qualitative research, and finally focuses on issues of representation, othering, location, and authority in interpretive inquiry. The aim of this chapter is to help situate the author to be more reflexive about his or her

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-6371-8.ch001

research. Therefore, in addition to an analysis of the implications of the above-mentioned issues, this chapter helps uncover power structures to showcase how the research process can move from a monologue to a dialogue.

This chapter does not attempt to provide a clean-cut solution or a one size fits all answer to these issues. Instead it enables researchers to analyze privilege, elaborate on the power structures inherent in their study, to provide context to the voices being heard, to understand how othering works in opposition to establishment of identity, and develop new approaches that move away from domination and control of the subjects (Coffey, 1996; Fine, 1994; Gould, 1995; Murray, Ozanne & Shapiro, 1994; Sluka & Robben, 2007). While the authors should get credit for their work and ideas, we must acknowledge the role of the original speaker, the co-producer of the work. In this chapter we suggest that reflection, rigorous analysis of biases and a strong sense of location will enhance the authority of the account (Mick, Pettigrew, Pechmann & Ozanne, 2012). Finally, we hope this chapter helps researchers become more accountable for our words and take responsibility not only for what we say but also understand the effect it has on others (Alcoff, 1991).

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

To understand the difference between qualitative and quantitative research, it is important to first delve into the philosophical foundations of research that beget these particular methodologies specifically positivist and interpretivist paradigms. Positivist traditions are rooted in the philosophy of Descartes while interpretivist traditions are based on the philosophical ideas of Kant, which were later developed by Edmund Husserl (Prasad, 2005). Descartes promoted rational thought while Husserl and other German idealists advanced

the idea that reality does not exist in the outside world rather within human consciousness itself (Prasad, 2005).

Paradigms are overarching philosophical systems that guide research and praxis (Willis, 2007). There are five major aspects of a paradigm (Chalmers, 1982). They are: a) explicitly stated laws and theoretical assumptions, b) standards used to apply these fundamental laws in myriad situations, c) instrumentation and instrumental techniques that bring the laws of the paradigm to bear on the real world, d) general metaphysical principles that guide work within the paradigm, and e) general methodological prescriptions about how to conduct work within a paradigm (Chalmers, 1982, p. 91; Willis, 2007).

Paradigms contain three elements, they are: a) ontology, b) epistemology, and c) methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Healy & Perry, 2000). Ontology is what one believes. It is concerned with the nature of reality, being or existence (Willis, 2007). Epistemology is concerned with what we can know about reality (however we define reality) and how we can know it (Willis, 2007). Methodology is used to describe the various aspects of a study such as design, procedures for data collection, subject selection, and forms of data analysis (Willis, 2007).

The main differences between qualitative and quantitative research stems from the ontological differences of the positivist and the interpretivist paradigms. The ontological belief within the positivist paradigm is realist that is there is a single reality driven by immutable natural laws and mechanisms, which is unchanging and value-free (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Healy & Perry, 2000; Hirschman, 1986; Willis, 2007). The ontological belief within the interpretivist paradigm is relativist that is that “realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content on the persons who holds them

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