

In other cases, qualitative methods and the long interview are compelling, almost obligatory. It is difficult to imagine a study of "friendship," for instance, that does not inquire into how people define a friend, how they experience a friendship, and the silent assumptions that operate in every social situation to dictate how friends and nonfriends act. The long interview lets us map out the organizing ideas of friendship and determine how these ideas enter into the individual's view of the world. It also lets us see how friendship works as a constituent of the individual's daily experience.

But there is a third class of research that invites qualitative research: the applied social sciences. As my colleagues demonstrate daily, social scientists now apply their skills to a wide range of urgent issues. They seek to determine the best relocation strategies for the elderly, how day care can be adapted to the needs of the single parent, how to establish new product development strategies, what the two-parent, single-child family wants in the design of a condominium, to give just a few local examples. These are issues that cry out for qualitative treatment. What does "home" mean to the elderly, how does a single mother organize her time, what is "innovation" for management, and what bundle of attitudes, interests, and activities is the urban nuclear family? The application of the social sciences to the study and improvement of contemporary life depends upon these intimate understandings of the respondent.

But if qualitative methods are important, their use in the study of modern societies is not by any means straightforward. The difficulty is that respondents lead hectic, deeply segmented, and privacy-centered lives. Even the most willing of them have only limited time and attention to give the investigator. Qualitative methods may have the power to take the investigator into the minds and lives of the respondents, to capture themwarts and all. But few respondents are willing to sit for all the hours it takes to complete the portrait.

Some social scientists are unconcerned with this shortage of time. In the conventional field setting, the anthropologist can insinuate him- or herself into the life of the community gradually and by stages. He or she can take many months of inquiry and exposure to construct an understanding of the community's world view and daily life. Plainly, however, the rigors and demands of this kind of qualitative inquiry are extremely high. Few social scientists have this much time at their disposal. Indeed, most are no richer in time than their respondents. Rarely can they suspend the demands of teaching, administration, other

research projects, and their own private lives sufficiently to create the vast blocks of time that participant observation demands.

But it is also true that certain vital arenas of modern life are simply closed to social scientific scrutiny. For instance, no North American family is likely to suffer the presence of an observer for an extended period of time. Public and private corporations are equally unenthusiastic about an observer who has no stake in the proceedings. Political parties have similar scruples, as do a range of special interest groups. North Americans value, depend upon, and vigorously defend their privacy. They are loath to see it breached. As a result, social scientists are denied the opportunity of participating as observers in the lives of many of the people they wish to understand.

These two factors, time scarcity and concern for privacy, stand as important impediments to the qualitative study of modern life. It is precisely these impediments that make the long interview so valuable as a means of inquiry. For this research strategy gives us access to individuals without violating their privacy or testing their patience. It allows us to capture the data needed for penetrating qualitative analysis without participant observation, unobtrusive observation, or prolonged contact. It allows us, in other words, to achieve crucial qualitative objectives within a manageable methodological context.

## 2 NINE KEY ISSUES

There are several areas of controversy within qualitative research methodology. One of these concerns the way in which the qualitative research community has fashioned, or refused to fashion, a relationship to the several social sciences and alternative methods of social scientific study. As we shall see, this point has proven explosively controversial. Some qualitative researchers have chosen to look beyond their own borders to other methods and many disciplines. Others have insisted on the virtue of tending their own garden. The methodology presented here comes down very firmly on the side of the former.

The second compelling question concerns the relationship between the researcher and his or her own culture. This issue takes us to the very heart of the great potential and the great difficulty of qualitative methodology. It is precisely because the qualitative researchers are working in their own culture that they can make the long interview do

such powerful work. It is by drawing on their understanding of how they themselves see and experience the world that they can supplement and interpret the data they generate in the long interview. Just as plainly, however, this intimate acquaintance with one's own culture can create as much blindness as insight. It can prevent the observer from seeing cultural assumptions and practices. The long interview presented here is deliberately designed to take advantage of the opportunity for insight and minimize the dangers of familiarity.

The third concerns the relationship between the researcher and the data. The key question here is: How can the researcher collect data that are both abundant and manageable? As we shall observe below, every qualitative interview is, potentially, a Pandora's box generating endlessly various and abundant data. The problem is to control the kind and amount of these data without also artificially constraining or forcing their character. This long interview is designed to take account of this problem as well.

The fourth concerns the relationship between the researcher and the respondent. How is this delicate relationship best constructed and construed? The long interview is a highly unusual speech event, one that makes for a most peculiar social relationship. There is no question that certain aspects of this event and relationship must be very exactly crafted (and manipulated) to serve the interests of good qualitative inquiry. But we must also take care to observe the rights (formal and informal) of the respondent. The method presented here seeks to take advantage of the qualitative opportunity without also taking advantage of the respondent.

These are four problem areas that any methodology in the qualitative literature must contend with. We shall see that these problems areas diverge and intersect to form several different configurations. In order to deal with them individually and in concert, I have treated them below in the form of nine key issues.

### **Issue 1: The Social Scientific Research Community**

What kind of relationship should exist between qualitative research and other methods of social scientific inquiry? There is no consensus here. Some qualitative researchers look for cooperation. Others have chosen a different posture. There are qualitative researchers who insist that they cannot fully belong to the social scientific world because they have been forced to live for so long at its margins. Some claim that they

do not wish to belong because their qualitative methods give them privileged access to proprietary truths. Still others argue that they are already the secret elite of this world for it is only they who can grasp and use the magical methods of the qualitative tradition. Qualitative researchers have mustered several, quite flattering, arguments with which to distance themselves from the other social sciences.

The evidence for these "special status" arguments is largely artificial. It is largely because there are few clear operational standards for training in, and the practice of, qualitative methods, that these methods are now used chiefly by a small group of scholars blessed with "special" abilities. Without these standards, qualitative researchers could not but remain a marginal presence in the social sciences. Without these standards, qualitative truths appeared somehow more evanescent than quantitative ones. Without these standards, qualitative methods were, necessarily, only within the reach of the "naturally" gifted.

It is, in other words, largely the failings of the field, not the special status of its practitioners, that have encouraged both "ghetto" protests and "magic circle" pretensions. Let us demonstrate that qualitative methods can be routinized and made accessible to all. As Merton, Fiske, and Kendall (1956: 17) insisted, some 30 years ago, qualitative interviewing is no "private and incommunicable art."

It is time for the field of qualitative methods to make itself a full citizen of the social sciences. If the field fails to move from defensive postures to constructive ones, and if it fails to begin to systematize and routinize qualitative methods, it can expect to lose the constituency in the social scientific community that now looks to it with interest. It is time to stop proclaiming, and to start demonstrating, the value of qualitative methods. This is a critical moment in the development of qualitative methods because, in the forceful but apposite language of everyday speech, it is time for qualitative partisans to "put up or shut up."

### **Issue 2: The Donor Social Sciences— A Call for Ecumenical Cooperation**

But taking up full citizenship in the social sciences is only the first of the qualitative researcher's new responsibilities. It is also necessary to bring the several "tribes" of the qualitative tradition into a state of useful cooperation. The goal of cooperation is complicated by the great diversity of approach that exists here. The development of each of these

subgroups in the qualitative community has been fitful, divergent, and uncoordinated.

Sociology witnessed an explosion of activity in the 1950s.<sup>1</sup> Directed or inspired by the Chicago School (Thomas, 1983), researchers took these new methods into medical schools (Becker, 1956), Pentecostal churches (Von Hoffman and Cassidy, 1956), forbidden communities (Lezner, 1956), the homes of the upper classes (Seeley et al., 1956), and every nook and cranny of entire communities (Warner and Lunt, 1941). Much of this work was designed to aid in the practice of participant observation. But because it is also designed for the study of North American societies, we shall find it useful in this study of the long interview proposed here.

The winter of positivism that prevailed in the social sciences in the 1960s and 1970s cut short much of sociology's enthusiasm for qualitative methods. Indeed, these methods might have passed altogether from the field were it not for the vigorous and brilliant efforts of Glaser and Strauss (1965, 1968) and Schatzman and Strauss (1973). This work also presumes a participant observation mode, but is useful for the creation of a model of the long qualitative interview. One of the special virtues of this work, and one of the things that accounts for its wide spread influence in the social sciences, is the scheme it proposes for data analysis. This will be referred to below.

Happily, there is now a qualitative revival underway in sociology. This new generation of scholarship continues to concentrate on participant observation, but it now draws on several disparate traditions, including symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, ethnomethodology, interpretive sociology, and antipositivists of all kinds.<sup>2</sup>

Psychology, another victim of the winter of positivism, has cultivated qualitative methods more routinely for clinical purposes than research ones (e.g., LaRossa and Wolf, 1985; Sullivan, 1954). Happily, this field is also beginning to show new interest in qualitative methods, and diverse theoretical orientations are at work here as well, including ethogenics, narrative psychology, and phenomenology.<sup>3</sup>

Anthropology, never the captive of positivist enthusiasms, helped to keep the qualitative faith alive in the 1950s and 1960s. However, for all of its practical commitment, it failed to formalize or articulate its methods. As a result, the field perhaps best situated to contribute to the methodological literature has contributed relatively little (Stocking, 1983: 112). With a few notable exceptions (e.g., DuBois, 1937;

Kluckhohn, 1940; Paul, 1953), the field has, until recently, created a surprisingly thin methodological literature and virtually no pedagogical tradition (Nash and Wintrob, 1972). It is worth pointing out, for instance, that students passed through the master's and Ph.D. programs in anthropology at a major American research university in the mid-1970s without taking so much as a single course in methodology. In the absence of this training, the field has relied on its own oral tradition to pass methods from one generation of scholars to the next. Just as often, each generation has had to reinvent these methods for itself. Happily, this methodological somnolence appears finally at an end.<sup>4</sup>

Evaluation research and administrative sciences also understood the value of qualitative methods at a time when other social sciences had forsaken them. These fields were, however, perhaps more reflexive and systematic than their anthropological brethren, and developed a rich theoretical and practical body of literature.<sup>5</sup>

Caught up in the preoccupations of positivism, consumer research has been unprepared, until recently, to credit any but the most limited range of qualitative methods as useful. Even here, in the development of the focus group, there has been substantially more concern with practice than theory.<sup>6</sup> Recently, a broader range of qualitative methods has been developed and applied.<sup>7</sup>

The "fits and starts" development, and heterogeneous character, of the qualitative community has discouraged the creation of robust research agenda and well-worked theoretical models. Moreover, it has allowed each subgroup to neglect the work being done in other fields. The key issue here, then, is that future research must be coordinated and ecumenical. It is now longer enough to pursue research on an ad hoc basis, and it is no longer possible to ignore the research activities and accomplishments of other fields. Too little work has been done on this question for any of us to afford the luxury of disciplinary isolationism.

As this coordinated undertaking develops, it is worth wondering whether any particular social science will emerge as the central "donor discipline" for qualitative methods (as statistics now is for quantitative ones). It is possible that sociolinguistics will claim this position. It can already provide a very precise understanding of some of the mechanics of the qualitative interview (Briggs, 1986; Churchill, 1973), and none of the social sciences is better placed to judge the delicate and subtle interactive processes of which the interview consists.<sup>8</sup> For these microcosmic issues, in any case, sociolinguistics has much to contribute.

There are many other fields that may someday exert an influence

here. There is not yet an "anthropology of the interview" in anthropology, but this cannot be far off. There is also reason to think that someday we will see systematic studies of the interview that examine it from the point of view of semiotics, symbolic interactionism, and phenomenology.

### Issue 3: The Qualitative/Quantitative Difference

This issue has been well argued in several places.<sup>9</sup> I wish merely to develop what I take to be the most telling and important differences between the qualitative and quantitative traditions.

Perhaps the most striking difference between the methods is the way in which each tradition treats its analytic categories. The quantitative goal is to isolate and define categories as precisely as possible before the study is undertaken, and then to determine, again with great precision, the relationship between them. The qualitative goal, on the other hand, is often to isolate and define categories during the process of research. The qualitative investigator expects the nature and definition of analytic categories to change in the course of a project (Glaser and Strauss, 1965). For one field, well defined categories are the means of research, for another they are the object of research.

Still more strikingly, the qualitative research normally looks for patterns of interrelationship between many categories rather than the sharply delineated relationship between a limited set of them. This difference can be characterized as the trade-off between the precision of quantitative methods and the complexity-capturing ability of qualitative ones. The quantitative researcher uses a lens that brings a narrow strip of the field of vision into very precise focus. The qualitative researcher uses a lens that permits a much less precise vision of a much broader strip.

Another of the differences between these methods turns on the data-reporting abilities of the respondent. Some social scientific questions elicit easy and rapid responses from the respondent. The respondent can identify precisely what is wanted, retrieve it easily, and report it without ambiguity. Other questions are much more demanding. The respondent has more difficulty determining what is wanted. He or she must then labor to identify and articulate a response. This difference between reporting abilities is, effectively, one of the differences between qualitative and quantitative methods. When the questions for which data are sought allows the respondent to respond readily and unambiguously,

closed questions and quantitative methods are indicated. When the questions for which data are sought are likely to cause the respondent greater difficulty and imprecision, the broader, more flexible net provided by qualitative techniques is appropriate.

A final difference between qualitative and quantitative approaches is the number and kind of respondents that should be recruited for research purposes. The quantitative project requires investigators to construct a "sample" of the necessary size and type to generalize to the larger population. In the qualitative case, however, the issue is not one of generalizability. It is that of access. The purpose of the qualitative interview is not to discover how many, and what kinds of, people share a certain characteristic. It is to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world. How many and what kinds of people hold these categories and assumptions is not, in fact, the compelling issue. It is the categories and assumptions, not those who hold them, that matter. In other words, qualitative research does not survey the terrain, it mines it. It is, in other words, much more intensive than extensive in its objectives.

The selection of respondents must be made accordingly. The first principle is that "less is more." It is more important to work longer, and with greater care, with a few people than more superficially with many of them. For many research projects, eight respondents will be perfectly sufficient. The quantitatively trained social scientist reels at the thought of so small a "sample," but it is important to remember that this group is not chosen to represent some part of the larger world. It offers, instead, an opportunity to glimpse the complicated character, organization, and logic of culture. How widely what is discovered exists in the rest of the world cannot be decided by qualitative methods, but only by quantitative ones. It is, precisely, this "division of labor" that makes the cooperative use of qualitative and quantitative methods so important to the qualitative investigator. It is only after the qualitative investigator has taken advantage of quantitative research that he or she is prepared to determine the distribution and frequency of the culture phenomenon that has come to light.

These differences between qualitative and quantitative methods have several implications. The first is that the two research approaches represent two very different sets of intellectual habits and frames of mind. This must be kept in mind when one tradition seeks to master, or to judge, the other. For instance, even after qualitative methods have been made more transparent and routine, students from the quantitative

tradition will not be able to master qualitative methods merely by learning a few techniques (any more than the qualitative practitioner can pretend to have mastered quantitative methods through the mastery of, say, regression analysis). Learning the qualitative tradition will require the absorption of new assumptions and "ways of seeing." It will require new strategies of conceptualizing research problems and data.

Second, the qualitative and quantitative approaches are never substitutes for one another. This is so because, necessarily, they observe different realities, or different aspects of the same reality. This distinctness must be honored. One cannot draw quantitative conclusions from qualitative work. Overholser (1986) notes the tendency of some qualitative researchers to speak of their results in quantitative terms. These investigators observe that "all," "some," "slightly more than half" of their respondents expressed a certain opinion, as if this were a useful or legitimate way to talk about the data. Falciglia, Wahlbrink, and Suszkiw (1985) evidence this tendency when, after more than 1,500 hours of observation with the sample of four respondents, they offer conclusions of a strongly quantitative character. Quantitative standards have been so deeply embedded in the "culture" of the social sciences that it may be some time before we are free of the tendency to judge qualitative methods by quantitative standards.

But it is also true that quantitative research never obviates the need for qualitative research. The literature is full of examples of individuals who have used their quantitative data to tell us how people think about and experience the world. In sum, a keen regard for what each of these methods can, and cannot, do is essential. Only thus can we learn to use them in conjunction and exploit their respective analytic advantages.

#### **Issue 4: Investigator as Instrument**

In qualitative research, the investigator serves as a kind of "instrument" in the collection and analysis of data (Cassell, 1977: 414; Guba and Lincoln, 1981: 128-152; Reeves Sanday, 1979: 528; Schwartz and Schwartz, 1955: 343). This metaphor is a useful one because it emphasizes that the investigator cannot fulfill qualitative research objectives without using a broad range of his or her own experience, imagination, and intellect in ways that are various and unpredictable (Miles, 1979: 597).

It is especially the complexity and depth of the qualitative research

enterprise that encourages this aspect of qualitative methods. Qualitative data are normally relatively messy, unorganized data. It demands techniques of observation that allow the investigator to sort and "winnow" the data, searching out patterns of association and assumption. This process of detection is hard to mechanize. It is necessary to listen not only with the tidiest and most precise of one's cognitive abilities, but also with the whole of one's experience and imagination. Detection proceeds by a kind of "rummaging" process. The investigator must use his or her experience and imagination to find (or fashion) a match for the patterns evidenced by the data. The diverse aspects of the self become a bundle of templates to be held up against the data until parallels emerge.

It is this "self as instrument" aspect of qualitative inquiry that has inspired some of the spurious claims referred to above. Some qualitative practitioners have used the "whole person" concept to argue that qualitative methods are best used by enchanted, artistic souls in the revelation of veiled and sacred truths. But let us say this plainly: The "self as instrument" notion is no warrant for romantic visions of qualitative research. The fundamentals of these methods are straightforward and transmittable. Even mortals can master and practice them. Someday we shall see these methods pass routinely between even the most disenchanting teacher and unenchanted student.

The self-as-instrument process works most easily when it is used simply to search out a match in one's experience for ideas and actions that the respondent has described in the interview. In my own research, I thought through the implications of one respondent's comments on his relationship with his grandchildren by rummaging through what I know about my own family relationships, the relationship I recall having with my grandfathers, and the relationship I have with nephews and nieces. This matching activity helped me see that this grandfather felt an interesting combination of delight and anxiety for a relationship in which he had no parental responsibility (the delight) but over which he had no parental control (the anxiety). The matching process helped fill in and flesh out what the respondent meant to say.

It is worth emphasizing that there is no simple one-to-one relationship in this matching process. There is no crude transfer from the investigator's experience to that of the respondent. On the contrary, the investigator's experience is merely a bundle of possibilities, pointers, and suggestions that can be used to plumb the remarks of a respondent.

Even quite plausible matches require substantiation and confirmation from the remainder of the interview analysis. They must be confirmed over and over before they are admissible as evidence.

Sometimes, there is no match to be found in the investigator's own experience. In these cases the investigator must proceed by fashioning an understanding of what is being said. The process of imaginative reconstruction is somewhat more difficult than the matching technique. It requires the investigator to build an alien, mysterious world of meaning out of assertions that are themselves unconnected, new, or strange. They must perform this task using their own categories of everyday thought, categories that neither anticipate nor welcome the new configuration of meaning. This is an essentially difficult undertaking. The investigator is like an inhabitant of the rain forest trying to imagine an adobe hut.

The process of imaginative reconstruction can be undertaken in several ways. One of the most effective of these requires the investigator to treat the respondent's new and strange propositions as if they were simply and utterly true. The investigator must let these ideas live in his or her own mind as if they were the most natural of assumptions. Once these ideas have been properly "entertained," the investigator can ask: "What does the world look like when I hold these things to be true." When this process succeeds, the investigator has succeeded in reconstructing a version of the respondent's view of the world by taking up and trying on his or her underlying assumptions and categories. If this method is more difficult than matching, it is also potentially more exciting. Its results are often the real achievements of the qualitative methodology.

My own most striking example of this technique came in the middle of an interview I conducted with a 75-year-old woman in the living room of her home (McCracken, 1988a). As we talked about the furnishings of this room, I found myself unable fully to understand her comments unless I gave up some of my own assumptions about the "thingness" of living room furniture. The simple act of following her commentary required me to begin to cast about for another way of seeing. As I listened to her, a new perspective arrived suddenly and with force. "My god," I thought, "this isn't a household, it's a museum. Its furnishings are not inanimate objects and consumer goods, but memorials." Entertaining the respondent's assertions as unexceptional truths is the most demanding but also the most rewarding of the objectives of the self-instrument technique.

### Issue 5: The Obtrusive/Unobtrusive Balance

Qualitative methods are most useful and powerful when they are used to discover how the respondent sees the world. This objective of the method makes it essential that testimony be elicited in as unobtrusive, nondirective manner as possible (Brenner, 1985). At crucial moments in the interview, the entire success of the enterprise depends upon drawing out the respondent in precisely the right manner. An error here can prevent the capture of the categories and the logic used by the respondent. It can mean that the project ends up "capturing" nothing more than the investigator's own logic and categories, so that the reminder of the project takes on a dangerously tautological quality.

One of the implications of this principle is that the investigator must not engage what is commonly called "active listening." This strategy encourages the investigator to "read" the hidden meaning of speech and gesture and "play it back" to the respondent. It encourages phrases like "what I hear you saying is . . .," and "I hear anger in your tone of voice." Active listening strategies must not be used by the qualitative researcher. They are obtrusive in precisely the manner that this research wishes to avoid, and they are likely to be almost completely destructive of good data, as the following excerpt from a qualitative interview transcript illustrates.

Interviewer: "What did you miss most about being away from your family?"

Respondent: "The family."

Interviewer: "The love and warmth?"

Here, the interviewer violates the law of nondirection, and suggests the terms in which the respondent ought to describe his experience. Happily, the respondent rejects the suggested terms, and proposes his own account.

Respondent: "The togetherness and that sort of thing, and being able to talk to your family, talk more intimately. In the army the talk is more or less on a lower level."

This is useful and interesting because it sets up a contrast (i.e., between the family and the army) and introduces a hierarchical metaphor (i.e., higher and lower levels of talk). Something of the

respondent's view of the world is beginning to emerge and the interviewer need only encourage this unobtrusively. Instead, the interview chooses, once more, to supply terms.

Interviewer: "Surface level?"

This strategy destroys the contrast and the metaphor, and our respondent, who knows bad qualitative research when he sees it, throws in the towel.

Respondent: "Surface level . . . I guess you could call it that."

There is cause, then, for scrupulous attention to this matter. It is important that the investigator allow the respondent to tell his or her own story in his or her own terms. However, it is just as important that the interviewer exercise some control over the interview. Qualitative data are almost always extraordinarily abundant. Every qualitative interview is, potentially, a Pandora's box. Every qualitative researcher is, potentially, the hapless victim of a shapeless inquiry. The scholar who does not control these data will surely sink without a trace.

The question, then, is not whether, but how, to impose order and structure on these data. One of the ways of doing so in the data-collection stage of research is through the construction of a series of "prompts." These are designed to help give structure to the interview. A second way of imposing order is through the construction of a well-designed questionnaire. Both of these will be discussed below in the next chapter.

### Issue 6: Manufacturing Distance

Scholars working in another culture have a very great advantage over those who work in their own. Virtually everything before them is, to some degree, mysterious. Those who work in their own culture do not have this critical distance from what they study. They carry with them a large number of assumptions that can create a treacherous sense of familiarity (Chock, 1986: 93; Greenhouse, 1985: 261). With these assumptions in place, an invisible hand directs inquiry and forecloses the range and the kind of things the investigator can observe and understand. As Von Hoffman and Cassidy (1956) put it, "Time and time again we would encounter a symbol, an act, a practice, assume it had a

meaning familiar to us, and find later on it did not" (p. 197). In order to avoid this problem it is incumbent on the investigator to "manufacture distance." It is necessary to create a critical awareness of matters with which we have a deep and blinding familiarity (Marcus and Fischer, 1986: 137-164).

But it is not only the investigator who needs to manufacture distance. Most respondents have difficulty giving a full account of what they believe and what they do. Long ago, their beliefs became assumptions and their actions became habits. Both are now almost completely submerged beneath the surface of consciousness. The investigator must help the respondent to recover his or her beliefs and actions from this taken-for-granted state. Here, too, the secret is to manufacture distance.

Investigators can manufacture distance in several ways. They can bring themselves to see with new detachment the categories and assumptions that organize their worlds. The classic method of doing so is to go off to another culture for an extended period of time and then return to one's own. Anthropologists who do this report that they return to a once familiar world with a profound sense of its peculiar and arbitrary character. Plainly, this is not a practical alternative for most social scientists, and other techniques are necessary.

It is worth observing here that there are many informal opportunities for distance manufacture. The events and occurrences of everyday life supply some of these. A good example is the sensation of surprise. Surprise is occasioned by violated expectation, and violated expectation points to the presence of otherwise hidden cultural categories and assumptions. Surprise is, to this extent, an opportunity for distance. Humor is another. Humor very deliberately mixes categories and violates assumptions. Watching how it operates on our expectations can be a useful way of creating distance. Virtually all of the creative arts engage in some form of distance manufacture. As one of its themes, Shakespeare's *King Lear*, for example, takes up what fathers and daughters owe to one another. By observing the structural details of this tragedy, we can stand back from familiar assumptions about familial relations and see them more clearly. In short, our day-to-day experience is rich in observational opportunities. A sharp eye will find manufactured distance at every turn.

One or two social scientists have quite deliberately used distance manufacture as the basis of their observation and analysis. Erving Goffman, in perhaps the most famous case in point, resolved to learn about the rules of social discourse by putting himself in a situation in

which he knew they would be violated, a mental institution. As each successive rule of social discourse was broken, Goffman began to see an entire set of principles that invisibly govern everyday life. With every violation of his expectations, distance was manufactured and the subtle rules of social life became clearer.

While investigators are free to experiment variously with their expectations, and see whether they can pry back their sense of familiarity and peer at the world behind, respondents are, understandably, somewhat less enthusiastic about this practice and quite slow to volunteer it on their own. For this group to stand back from categories and assumptions, gentle intervention is required. As we shall see below, one of the ways of creating distance is to establish certain prompting procedures that invite the respondent to articulate what he or she otherwise takes for granted. These prompts can be conversation cues. They can be well-designed questions. They can also be a series of stimuli (such as photographs) in which the respondent is asked to point out and account for similarities and differences amongst the stimuli. Good research helps respondents report their experience by manufacturing the distance they need to do so.

In sum, both the investigator and the respondent need the opportunity to see familiar data in unfamiliar ways. The four-step method proposed in the next chapter discusses how both parties can manufacture distance.

### **Issue 7: The Questionnaire**

The use of a questionnaire is sometimes regarded as a discretionary matter in qualitative research interview. But, for the purposes of the long qualitative interview, it is indispensable. The demanding objectives of this interview require its use (Brenner, 1985).

The questionnaire has several functions. Its first responsibility is to ensure that the investigator covers all the terrain in the same order for each respondent (preserving in a rough way the conversational context of each interview). The second function is the care and scheduling of the prompts necessary to manufacture distance. As we shall see below, these prompts must be carefully crafted, and precisely situated, in the interview. It is too much to expect the interviewer to formulate, or recall, them in the demanding circumstances of the interview. The third function of the questionnaire is that it establishes channels for the direction and scope of discourse. The really open-ended interview is an

ever-expanding realm of possibility in which the generative power of language is unleashed to potentially chaotic effect. The fourth function of the questionnaire is that it allows the investigator to give all his or her attention to the informant's testimony. The first responsibility of the interviewer is the highly contingent work of assumption-inference, and he or she must not be distracted by any task that can be routinized. In sum, the questionnaire protects the larger structure and objectives of the interview so that the interviewer can attend to immediate tasks at hand.

It is important to emphasize that the use of the questionnaire does not preempt the "open-ended" nature of the qualitative interview. Within each of the questions, the opportunity for exploratory, unstructured responses remains. Indeed, this opportunity is essential (Merton, Fiske, and Kendall, 1956: 43-50). Extemporaneous strategies of investigation are often the only road to understanding. The interviewer must be able to take full advantage of the contingency of the interview and pursue any opportunity that may present itself. In sum, the questionnaire that is used to order data and free the interviewer must not be allowed to destroy the elements of freedom and variability within the interview.

Furthermore, it is not the purpose of a fixed interview to abolish the characteristic abundance and "messiness" of qualitative data. Qualitative analysis, as we shall see below, requires that the interviewer work with substantial chunks of data. Without data of this character, it is difficult to see which ideas "go" together in the mental universe of the respondent, or the "cultural logic" on which these ideas rest. For analytic purposes, it is necessary to capture not just ideas but also the context in which these ideas occur. This context is, in a manner of speaking, the small amount of seawater that keeps the catch alive.

### **Issue 8: The Investigator/Respondent Relationship**

One of the important differences between most qualitative and quantitative research is that the former demands a much more complex relationship between investigator and respondent. This complexity raises several issues.

The first of these is simple: Who does the respondent think the investigator is? As sentient social actors, North American respondents use every available cue to categorize the investigator and the project. They judge the institutional affiliation of the investigator, the project description, and even his or her appearance, mode of dress, and patterns of speech (Denzin, 1978b; Strauss and Schatzman, 1955). This semiotic



exercise can dramatically influence whether and how the respondent responds to the questions they are asked (Briggs, 1986; Williams, 1964). If the investigator does not carefully control these cues, they will confound the nature of the respondent's participation in the interview and the data he or she provide (Benney and Hughes, 1956; Cannell et al., 1968, 1979; Lerner, 1956; Stebbins, 1972; Strauss and Schatzman, 1955; Vidich, 1955; Vogt, 1956).

Some of the strategies are straightforward. In my own experience, the best manner in which to manipulate the presentation of self for interview purposes is to strike a balance between formality and informality for each of the media in question. A certain formality in dress, demeanor, and speech is useful because it helps the respondent cast the investigator in the role of a "scientist," someone who asks very personal questions out of not personal but professional curiosity. This formality also helps to reassure the respondent that the investigator can be trusted to maintain the confidentiality has been promised the respondent. A certain, balanced, informality is useful because it reassures the respondent that for all of his or her professional training, the investigator is not a cold, distant creature unacquainted with or indifferent to the complexities and difficulties of the respondent's lifeworld. Naturally, the formality-informality balance will have to be tuned up or down according to the particular demands of special contexts.<sup>10</sup>

The second compelling question is the reciprocal one: Who does the investigator think the respondent is? There is a group within the qualitative research community that wishes to make the respondent a kind of collaborator (e.g., Elden, 1981; Gross and Mason, 1953: 200; Reason and Rowan, 1981). This approach has the merit of encouraging fuller disclosure of research objectives, and this in turn helps to solve some of the ethical issues that surround qualitative work (Whittaker, 1981). It is also praiseworthy for methodological reasons insofar as it sometimes produces quite spectacular results, as the work of Whyte (1955) and Turner (1967) attests (see Campbell, 1955).

But there is something in the qualitative interview that argues against full collaboration. Certainly, the investigator must be careful to establish a relationship of substance, and some kind of "connection" with the respondent (Benney and Hughes, 1956; Geertz, 1979; Stebbins, 1972; Wax, 1952). But it is possible to go too far and allow the intimacy to obscure or complicate the task at hand. The most obvious danger is that the respondent who is given the terms and objectives of research is

not likely to give fully spontaneous and unstudied responses. The respondent may prove overhelpful, and try to "serve up" what he or she thinks is wanted. Second, collaboration raises the possibility of what Miller has called "overrapport" (1952). Unambiguous social distance between respondent and interviewer is especially necessary when "tough" questions must be asked and "delicate" analyses undertaken. I, for one, have worked with respondents whose personal charm and social position might well have obscured aspects of a life that needed to be seen and commented upon unblinkingly (McCracken, 1986). Third, when the interview is relatively anonymous, the respondent is blessed with the opportunity for candor (of the sort that is said to flourish on airplanes). This opportunity grows less likely as a more substantial relationship is established. There are grounds, then, to doubt the wisdom of making the respondent a collaborator.

The respondent in a qualitative interview is subject to several risks. Participation in qualitative interviews can be time consuming, privacy endangering, and intellectually and emotionally demanding in ways that quantitative interviews rarely are. To make matters worse, it is difficult for many respondents to anticipate these dangers at the outset of the interview. Investigators must take pains to see that the respondent is not overtly or subtly victimized by the interview process. The "standard ethics protocol" presented in Appendix B suggests one of the ways respondent rights can be protected.

But I am persuaded that the long interview offers the respondent benefits as well as risks. When I proposed long interviews with individuals between the ages of 65 and 75, funding agencies expressed concern that these interviews might prove fatiguing. I, too, was alarmed that my respondents might be dangerously taxed by the experience of answering intimate questions over a long period. Our fears proved unfounded. Almost without exception, respondents proved more durable and energetic than their interviewer. Again and again, I was left clinging to consciousness and my tape recorder as the interview was propelled forward by respondent enthusiasm. Something in the interview process proved so interesting and gratifying that it kept replenishing respondent energy and involvement.

The answers to this mystery are several. As Cannell and Axelrod (1956) and Caplow (1956) note, the qualitative interview gives the respondent the opportunity to engage in an unusual form of sociality.

Suddenly, they find themselves in the presence of the perfect conversational partner, someone who is prepared to forsake his or her own "turns" in the conversation and listen eagerly to anything the respondent has to say (Stebbins, 1972). This characteristic of the qualitative interview leads to other benefits, including the opportunity to make oneself the center of another's attention (Ablon, 1977; Von Hoffman and Cassidy, 1956), to state a case that is otherwise unheard (Leznoff, 1956; Wax, 1952), to engage in an intellectually challenging process of self-scrutiny (Merton and Kendall, 1946), and even to experience a kind of catharsis (Gorden, 1956: 159). Together, these advantages suggest that there are for most respondents benefits to compensate for the risks of the qualitative interview.

### Issue 9: Multimethod Approaches

The long qualitative interview for the study of contemporary North America should not be used in isolation. For all its perspicuity in certain matters, it is a perfectly unreliable, even misleading, guide in other respects. Or, to put this another way, the realities that the long qualitative interview can report are not the only realities with which the social scientist must contend (Trow, 1957: 35). Within the qualitative domain, there are several options at the investigator's disposal. Each of these has certain advantages. When some kind of participant observation is possible, it has dramatic advantages, as the anthropological investigator is well aware. It can deliver data that are beyond the conscious understanding or implicit grasp of even the best intentioned respondent. Indeed, it is in some cases the only way to obtain reliable data.<sup>11</sup> Focus groups can also be useful, particularly when respondents promise to be more forthcoming with the stimulus or the safety of a group of fellow respondents.<sup>12</sup> When the research project demands more rigor in the investigation of matters of belief and action than the long interview can provide, "repertory grid" analysis may be useful.<sup>13</sup> Research objectives may also call for life histories,<sup>14</sup> case studies,<sup>15</sup> protocols,<sup>16</sup> and the diary method.<sup>17</sup>

The qualitative researcher must also be prepared to take full advantage of quantitative methodologies. As it now stands, many qualitative researchers are disinclined to use quantitative methods. There is no question, however, that, especially in highly heterogeneous, complex societies, these methods are indispensable. Unfortunately, the

literature that demonstrates how this most difficult of multimethod bridges can be constructed is not abundant.<sup>18</sup>

These nine issues are germane to every qualitative researcher. They have a particular relevance for the investigator who wishes to do qualitative research in his or her own society. Each of them represents another aspect of a great methodological challenge: How can one do qualitative research in a society that consistently frustrates the investigator's full and intimate access to the lives of his or her respondents. The next section of the book seeks to systematize the points made here, and to offer a model of inquiry for the long interview.

### 3. THE FOUR-STEP METHOD OF INQUIRY

For purposes of exposition, this section divides the circle of qualitative methods in two directions. The east-west axis separates two domains: analytic data and cultural data. The north-south axis separates two domains: review processes and discovery processes. Together, the axes divide the qualitative research circle into four quadrants, each of which represents a separate and successive step in the research process. The quadrants are:

- (1) review of analytic categories and interview design
- (2) review of cultural categories and interview design
- (3) interview procedure and the discovery of cultural categories
- (4) interview analysis and the discovery of analytical categories

These stages can be organized into a "four-step" pattern that shows their sequence and the nature of their interaction.

#### Step 1: Review of Analytic Categories

The first step of the long qualitative interview begins with an exhaustive review of the literature. Some researchers have taken qualitative methods as license to ignore the scholarship that bears on their investigation. They contend that qualitative methods are so powerfully and uniquely illuminating that they take the investigator