

The Potentials of Qualitative Inquiry for a Pluralistic Psychology

Summary

The expansion and enrichment of qualitative forms of inquiry in recent years has been remarkable. Signaling these innovations is the formation of the Society for Qualitative Inquiry in Psychology, the Society's entry into Division 5, and the emergence of the new APA journal, *Qualitative Psychology*. However, as many now see it, the significance of this movement far exceeds the development of research practices alone. A distinguishing characteristic of the movement is its support for a pluralist psychology. Qualitative practices vary enormously in their inherent epistemologies, ontologies, and values, and yet, the adherents of these practices generally remain open, curious, and mutually respectful of one another. Dialogues are productive, and new hybrids often emerge. In our view, as qualitative practices and dialogues move across various APA divisions, they are subtly changing the landscape of the discipline. At base, they are softening the demands for a singular slate of methodological criteria. More importantly, they are opening the doors to a multiplicity of views on the nature of knowledge, the possible goals of psychology, and on values and ideology. Further, they are opening routes to dialogue and innovation that go beyond contrast and compare. In effect, we are moving toward a more genuinely inclusive and productive

psychology. The contributions to this symposium are designed to illustrate, expand and enrich these ideas. Kenneth Gergen will trace the evolution and cross-disciplinary expansion of a qualitative research practice. Michelle Fine focuses on critical participatory action research in schools and prisons as linked to theory and policy development. Scott Churchill shows how qualitative research with animals informs comparative psychology and pedagogy. And Joseph Gone explores the implications of archival inquiry into a native American tribe, as related to contemporary ethnopsychology and therapeutic practice. An open Discussion will follow, led by Ruthellen Josselson and Mary Gergen.

Experiential Interaction with Animal Subjects: A Foundation for

Subsequent Research Design

Scott Churchill

Robert Holt many years ago made a clean distinction between "formal assessment" and "informal assessment," with regard to the process of forming a diagnostic impression of a patient. As a well-regarded theorist-practitioner, Holt was drawing our attention to the ways in which "informal" processes of everyday social interaction figure their way into the "formal" assessment reports written by professionals about the patients/clients about whom they are asked to consult.

I would like, in my presentation, to discuss how in the practice of comparative psychological research there might be something akin to "informal" assessment of the research subjects' cognitive abilities (for example) that come into play in the "formal" experiments one later designs to investigate scientifically the "hunches" that one obtains from the informal "methods" of observation.

To this end, I will discuss with my own animal behavior research mentor (who is now retired) the ways in which his own "informal" observations of primate behavior figured into the experiments that he designed to study their social and cognitive skills. My intent will be to present clear evidence of how informal behavioral interactions - a kind of proto-"performative" research -- with one's non-human subjects has figured into formal studies of animal behavior.

I will then tell the story of my own interactions with the bonobos at the Fort Worth Zoo beginning in the late 1990s and continuing up until the recent addition of several new members to the group (which has curtailed the kind of informal interactions with the original three male bonobos who had been held in captivity for years before the introduction of a female and several younger members of the species). I will show video and describe the nature of the encounters and talk about what "informal" insights into the behavior of this species arose from my interactions with them.

The idea of researcher "interaction" with a species under investigation will be discussed in terms of the emerging accounts of human-animal interactions in the published literature of animal studies.

The question regarding how a "performative" approach to the presentation of even informal observational studies can enhance one's ability to communicate one's ideas about a species of interest will be addressed through reference to conference presentations where imitation of bonobo behavior has played a significant part in communicating to an audience the ways in which sophisticated philosophical (ie, phenomenological - eg, Merleau-Ponty and Husserl) ideas about communication and access to the meaning of others' experience are being presented.