HEURISTIC INQUIRY

Researching Human Experience Holistically

NEVINE SULTAN

Brief Contents

Detailed Contents

Preface

The evolution of qualitative research over the past three decades has provoked a flurry of newly minted inductive approaches that, previously, would have been frowned upon. This progression has also triggered enthusiastic efforts to reconstruct a number of already well-established qualitative methodologies. The process of reenvisioning a traditional research approach does not necessarily mean that the original processes by which it was conducted were amiss. Hardly! It means only that we qualitative researchers are cognizant of the changing world around us and, in our commitment to competent research practice and its dissemination, are also committed to active participation in the movement, expansion, and growth of our research orientation and research methods in general.

Purpose and Rationale

In 1990, SAGE published Clark Moustakas's *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications*, a slim volume that outlined a method for conducting qualitative research that, while it was disciplined and systematic, was also imaginative and highly experiential. Since the original publication of Moustakas's groundbreaking classic book, the heuristic approach has been essentially "lost" due to lack of precision and detailed description of the underlying processes. Additionally, Moustakas's small, modest volume is in dire need of revision and revitalization to acknowledge the dramatic evolution of qualitative inquiry during the past few decades and to more efficiently meet the needs of the 21st century researcher. Today's qualitative research resides at the highly complex intersection of human experience, perception, memory, language, history, culture and other social systems, relational interactions, and social justice. In that sense, engaging in qualitative research in today's world is an act of hope and resilience and a quest for deliverance and reimagination. This book takes heuristic inquiry as we know it and stretches it to more efficiently address this vibrant diversity.

Having the capacity to expand traditional research approaches, data representation, and manuscript writing as we know and practice them enables us to formulate research questions and engage our topics of inquiry from an innovative and inventive stance. No longer are we held hostage to a predetermined, fixed research agenda that, though it may align with our overall

purpose, may or may not suit fundamental details within our process of inquiry. The idea, here, is not to abandon or reject the foundations of how we do empirical research and share findings with our colleagues and the general public, nor is it to undermine rigor. Instead, the aim is to ground our research process in real life by giving a voice—through relational and empathic dialogue—to those who have shared the experiences we are researching. In addition, we hope to represent our findings in such a manner as to connect with as many readers as possible and to inspire in them novel and productive ways of interacting with phenomena that they, too, may have experienced. This attitude allows us to unfilter the clinical and opaque gaze from which we tend to approach our topics of inquiry, with the understanding that the scientific stance is but one dimension from which we may examine and explore. It invites us to transcend the dichotomous view of research as either scientific or nonscientific and to engage in inquiry within the continuum of art and science. It enables us to take the work we do as researchers beyond the walls and halls of academia and to invite genuine dialogue with people in the real world, transcending the act of collecting information pretentiously and maximizing our potential to collapse boundaries between research and practice without compromising rigor.

Focused on exploring human experience from a holistic perspective, this book presents heuristic inquiry as a unique phenomenologically aligned, experiential, creative, and reflexive–relational approach to qualitative research that is also rigorous and evidence-based. In this book, I expand some of the distinctive attributes of this unique research approach to explore questions of interest that emerge from deeply personal human experiences with social, cultural, and potentially universal implications. I describe a newly distinguishing perspective of this methodology that views and treats participants not as passive subjects of research but rather as active co-researchers and partners in a contextually embedded exploratory process of inquiry marked by genuineness and intersubjectivity. Hence, in the interest of reconstituting how we contextualize our shared journey, the term *participants* is replaced with *co-researchers* or *research partners* throughout the text. Additionally, I offer and use the term **research team** to describe the collective group of researcher and research partners.

Likewise, I expand the parameters of heuristic inquiry in its original form, in which a primary focus was on the inner experience of the researcher. I propose a heuristic approach that supports the interweaving of inner and outer—intrapersonal and interpersonal, individual and collective, personal and

professional—experience, one in which, together with our co-researchers, we either discover or encounter new knowledge and jointly create freshly elaborated meanings and understandings of it. From this social constructivist perspective, *discovery* and *encounter* are used interchangeably throughout the narrative, and the personhood of researcher and co-researchers is integrated and honored within the greater social context.

In keeping with the theme of interweaving various dimensions of experience, I use the labyrinth as a metaphor for the heuristic inquiry research journey. **Labyrinths** are ancient, archetypal symbols constituted of a series of winding spirals that form a circle representing a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Unlike a maze, in a labyrinth, there is one path that leads toward the center and another path that leads toward the exit. In a manner of speaking (and to use a worn cliché), the only way out is through. However, what matters is not the path that is followed but the nature of the journey itself, as the researcher intuits, asks, reflects, shares, learns, connects, and integrates in an ultimate search for knowledge and meaning. Labyrinths provide opportunities for both inner and outer processes; while researchers may sometimes *feel* lost as they walk a labyrinth's circuitous path, they will not actually *get* lost. Due to their holistic nature, labyrinths engage all of our many dimensions: the cognitive, the emotional, the sensory∞kinesthetic, the perceptual, the spiritual, and the social∞relational. As such, labyrinths have been used throughout history to symbolize the many transformative journeys (Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism, 2010) in human life that may lead to growth, well-being, and wholeness.

Similarly, the theme of interrelationship and nonlinearity is prevalent throughout this text. This is not unusual when considering the fluid nature of heuristic inquiry and the philosophical traditions from which it emerged. Thus, the **infinity symbol** (∞) will be used often to represent such nondual, fluid relationships. This symbol has its recorded beginnings in the mathematical concept of the largest sum possible. Throughout history, however, the infinity symbol has come to represent a number of different themes, including spirituality, eternity, the interrelationship of endings and beginnings, and empowerment. As you read this book, you will be able to identify the significance of this symbol to some of these ideas and to heuristic research.

Most important, and as we reenvision heuristic inquiry to suit the needs of contemporary researchers and research teams, I offer a new take on a traditional perspective. Let me explain. Phenomenological and

phenomenologically aligned methods of research have traditionally been branded as the study of **lived experience**, as though past life events are now "over" and ought to be conceptualized in the past tense. I take this traditional description and give it a linguistic and foundational turn that attributes to heuristic inquiry the broader and deeper vision of researching **living experience**. This new paradigm, while it acknowledges multiple episodes of human experience within a single life, more accurately ascribes to human experience a continual, homogenous, interconnected spirit. Within this framework, any and all episodes are not isolated entities with clearly delineated beginnings, middles, and ends but are interrelated and bonded as part of a single, continuing process that is always unfolding in the present moment. Past experience is not something that occurred in history with no bearing on one's present moment in time but is a living, breathing part of one's here-and-now way of being in the world. Hence, heuristic inquiry is the exploration of living experience.

Finally, through the use of real-life samples and examples illustrating the various processes of heuristic research, I offer a construction of the approach that is straightforward and informal yet honors its creative, intuitive, and polydimensional nature. I also provide a number of pedagogical features to facilitate the comprehension and application of this approach, including reflection questions at the beginning of each chapter; a variety of activities; journaling tips and prompts; contemplative and meditative exercises; thematic boxes; artwork, photos, and illustrations of researcher and participant artifacts; and other features designed to facilitate the reader's interaction with the material being presented. I close each chapter with a "Closing Reflections" section that synopsizes some of the core themes of the chapter.

Audience

This book is intended for graduate students, advanced undergraduate students, early career researchers, and professionals in the fields of education, leadership, social sciences, mental health and human services, health sciences, and other related fields due to its remarkable inclusion of the researcher's experience as a key element in the process of inquiry, with equal significance to that of co-researchers'. It is also a unique resource for seasoned qualitative researchers with a dynamic interest in infusing color and variety into research approaches they may have exhausted. Additionally, I would recommend this book for the general public as it describes an intuitive process of inquiry to which many who

are not professional researchers can easily relate. May I also go out on a limb and say that this book offers an exceptional opportunity for quantitative researchers to dabble in the world of inductive inquiry without the confines imposed by some of the more highly structured qualitative models and experiment with reenvisioned meanings for *rigor* and *empiricism*? It does! After all, who made the rules defining what is *rigorous* and what is *empirical* in the world of research? And why do we blindly conform to these rules rather than creatively explore other avenues of research? By the way, I am not opposed to quantitative research or scientific knowledge acquisition as it is traditionally understood. I have both conducted and participated in my fair share of quantitative studies, and I acknowledge their role and their necessity. On the other hand, attempting to apply the rules of quantitative research to exploring phenomena that are ambiguous, complex, and highly personal in nature comes with challenges. One size does not fit all!

Speaking of rules, I would like to stress that while this text does propose a systematic and highly detailed description of the heuristic research process and various avenues for approaching and applying it, it does not offer an absolute or fixed blueprint for conducting the "perfect" heuristic study. To do so would be oxymoronic, as it would undermine the autobiographical, creative, and highly process- and content-oriented nature of this qualitative research approach. Heuristic inquiry is a spontaneous and intuitive methodology that embraces the individuality of researcher and co-researchers, the topic of inquiry, and the findings that are ultimately illuminated, all within the framework of relationship and collaboration. It is a collage of processes and phases that invites those who have shared (or are sharing) a similar experience on a communal journey through which new meaning and knowledge will be collectively elucidated and through which transformation may take place. In that sense, and quite paradoxically, heuristic research is best engaged as a nonsequential, open-ended process. This enhances its potential to offer us a valid and trustworthy universal representation of a highly personal phenomenon elaborated through individual voices using rich, textured narratives and other forms of creative self-expression.

Organization

Chapter 1. What Is Heuristic Inquiry, Anyway?

In this opening chapter, I explore and describe the nature of heuristic inquiry. I

begin with a brief recent history of the development of this approach. I define some of the purposes of conducting heuristic studies. I include a description of the essential features of heuristic inquiry and also briefly outline the numerous phases and processes involved in the heuristic approach. I conclude with a description of some of the limitations of this methodology and ways to approach the challenges they pose for researchers.

Chapter 2. Locating Heuristic Inquiry Within Contemporary Qualitative Research

This chapter pays special attention to how heuristic inquiry is similar to other qualitative methods and also how it is quite different. I compare and contrast heuristic inquiry with grounded theory, narrative research, and feminist research. I identify ways that aspects of heuristic inquiry may be bricolaged with and embedded within some of these approaches, thereby establishing avenues for interdisciplinary alliances and situating heuristic inquiry in the larger landscape of contemporary qualitative research.

Chapter 3. Philosophical and Theoretical Foundations of Heuristic Inquiry

In this chapter, I discuss the value of heuristic research as an empirical, qualitative, and social constructivist approach grounded in the exploration of rich and complex phenomena. I offer an overview of the philosophical foundations of heuristic inquiry as a means for exploring questions and making sense of human experience and the world. This begins with Edmund Husserl and includes discussion of contributions by Martin Buber, Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Michael Polanyi, Eugene Gendlin, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. I describe a variety of ways of *being* and ways of *knowing* within the context of heuristic research, as well as the axiological, methodological, and rhetorical facets of the methodology. I illustrate heuristic inquiry's playful though disciplined focus on curiosity and openness; the personal, autobiographical nature of the research question; the importance of recognizing and establishing connections between the research question and theory and all other aspects of the research process; the creative, intuitive, nonlinear spirit of this process of inquiry; the organic nature of the acquisition and emergence of original knowledge; the honoring of personal attunement, felt sense, and tacit knowing; and the researcher's personal experience and perceptions. This includes the interaction between observation and measurement of behavior and

participation within and between interpersonal and intrapersonal engagement. I also address what I view as the continua of subjective∞objective experience and emergence∞discovery.

Chapter 4. Heuristic Processes and Phases

In this chapter, I describe the various processes and phases involved in heuristic research, many of which may be used in sequential or nonsequential fashion (or both). I describe how identifying with the focus of inquiry, self-dialogue, tacit knowing, intuition, indwelling, focusing, and engaging one's internal frame of reference underlie the six phases of heuristic research, which are initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. I illustrate various examples of how each of these processes and phases might unfold. I focus on the how-to practicalities of the methodology while underlining its highly subjective, process-oriented nature.

Chapter 5. Heuristic Research Design

This chapter serves as an outline for conducting a heuristic research study in an organized and disciplined manner while not losing sight of the importance of maintaining the fluid spirit of this unique methodology. I begin with the researcher's awareness of a salient issue, topic, or problem. I then address processes for formulating the central research question with an understanding of its foundational role to the process of inquiry; conducting a review of the professional literature; preparing for the study (writing a proposal, preparing invitation letters and informed consent forms, etc.); and purposively selecting co-researchers.

Chapter 6. Heuristic Data Collection, Organization, and Analysis

In this chapter, I address heuristic approaches to data collection using a variety of methods (with a focus on interviewing), organizing and managing the data in multiple ways, identifying themes, and creating co-researcher depictions. I clarify how researchers may represent their illuminated findings through individual depictions, composite depictions, exemplary portraits, and creative syntheses. I highlight several unique heuristic studies of questions/issues undertaken by a variety of authors from multiple disciplines on a number of different experiences, including internalized racism, spirituality, yoga and well-

being, ecological writing, and embodiment. Recognizing that heuristic inquiry is very open-ended research, I address the issue of being realistic about time and other practical parameters without compromising the integrity of a study.

Chapter 7. Relationality, Reflexivity, and Meaning-Making

Here, I dig deeper into the myriad ways of doing this type of inquiry. I focus on the relational dimensions that view participants as co-researchers and partners in a shared learning and transformational experience. Taking the relational aspects further, I address ways of honoring difference and uniqueness among co-researchers, and I discuss some of the many ways personal and universal dimensions of experience are interconnected. I examine how researchers may address issues of personal and collective meaning; construction and reconstruction/renegotiation of narratives; power and privilege; personal and collective empowerment and agency; and advocacy and social justice, all of which are both personally and culturally embedded. I highlight the importance of engaging researcher reflexivity and locating oneself within and throughout the process of inquiry with a mind to clarify the role of the researcher in a manner that honors its vitality and its potential to enhance rigor and trustworthiness. This leads into a discussion of the impact of heuristic inquiry on the researcher, research partners, and readers of the findings, and the potential for growth and transformation.

Chapter 8. Evaluating the Research: A Collaborative Process

In this chapter, I present a number of approaches for evaluating the findings of a heuristic study for rigor and trustworthiness. This includes a variety of traditional evaluation criteria and strategies, as well as approaches designed specifically to evaluate a heuristic study for alignment with the heuristic methodology and for integrity. I describe how the role of the co-researchers is equally influential to that of the researcher in the evaluation and how using a collaborative evaluation process enriches its relational and emancipatory value and allows for integration of the research experience and the personal experience(s) from which the research question(s) emerged. I also shed some light on the importance of the primary researcher taking a reflexive leadership role in the evaluation process.

Chapter 9. Writing a Living Manuscript: An Embodied Relational Approach

The focus of this chapter is on ideas for writing a manuscript that honors the holistic and intuitive nature of heuristic inquiry by using structurally and texturally nuanced narrative, with the intention of maintaining the integrity and richness of human experience and promoting higher resonance within readers of the findings. I address the importance of writing a living manuscript, one that honors the balance between maintaining rigor and writing in an intriguing manner that keeps readers engaged beyond the reading event. I attend to some of the social justice dimensions of manuscript writing, such as the use of non-academic language to reach as diverse a readership as possible and to be as inclusive as is reasonable.

Chapter 10. Ethics of Heuristic Research

In this critical chapter, I outline facets of ethics to consider when using heuristic inquiry as a research method. This includes gaining an understanding of ethics and some of its core principles and recognizing ethical dilemmas that may emerge in a heuristic study surrounding issues such as relational boundaries between researcher and research partners, informed consent, and transparency. It also involves learning how to apply ethical codes and decision-making models that meet and transcend the requirements of research review boards, with a focus on maintaining rigor while remaining flexible to the emergent nature of heuristic inquiry. Due to the demanding nature of engaging in research that holds personal meaning to the researcher, I dedicate a section of the chapter to the potential perils of vicarious/secondary experiences during the data collection, organization, and analysis processes and to the importance of embracing a self-care regimen during the research journey.

Chapter 11. Universal Applications of Heuristic Inquiry: Bridging Research and Living Experience

In this final full chapter, I profile a number of disciplines and practices in which heuristic inquiry may be engaged as an approach for exploring human experience and advancing knowledge. These include but are not limited to education, political science and government, health care, conflict transformation, and counseling and psychotherapy. I address how heuristic inquiry may be applied both formally and informally, paving ways for

integrating past experience and new knowledge and for bridging research and living experience. Again, I underscore some heuristic studies of issues explored by researchers from various disciplines on a variety of topics and propose ideas for studies in other disciplines, some of which do not appear to have any heuristic research history and for which the heuristic approach may be appropriate.

Chapter 12. An Ending∞Beginning

In this brief closing note, I acknowledge and reflect on the end of our shared journey in this book and invite you to begin your own process of heuristic inquiry.

Locating Myself in This Process

It is my personal premise that knowledge is, generally speaking, acquired subjectively and is ultimately understood within a self-in-relation framework: self in relation to self, self in relation to other, and self in relation to the world. That is, knowledge begins with a personal, inner inquiry surrounding a topic of interest that has manifested in one's experience in the world and that emerges and matures through one's inner and outer interactions with the topic in context. This is also the premise of phenomenological (and phenomenologically aligned), social constructivist, and qualitative research approaches in general and is one of the key factors distinguishing qualitative inquiry from the more objective and measurement-oriented character of quantitative approaches. One of the primary tasks of the heuristic researcher is to *locate herself* within the research task—that is, to describe her role as the researcher. In keeping with this spirit of transparency (which is but one of many intriguing facets of the heuristic approach) it is important that I disclose my personal interests, motives, biases, values, and goals as I undertook the task of writing this book.

I am a qualitative, social constructivist, and heuristic researcher. I am also a counselor educator, a licensed mental health practitioner, and a poet. Relationships, dialogue, and meaning-making are critical to my way of being in this world. As a professional counselor, educator, and researcher, I truly believe that only through immersion in a warm, empathic, nonjudgmental, and genuine relationship with oneself, with others, and with the world can authentic interaction flow and knowledge be shared. As a relational body-centered gestalt psychotherapist, I do not view dialogue and discourse as exclusive to the verbal

domain; communication also happens nonverbally. There are spoken and written exchanges, and there are exchanges that are communicated through other, non-languaged forms of expression.

This book was inspired by my personal experience using the heuristic inquiry approach for my dissertation study, in which I explored the embodied experiences of body-centered psychotherapists in the therapeutic process. The very journey of selecting a research approach for my study was highly heuristic, emerging at the junction of my personal experience of embodiment in the clinical setting and my embodied way of being in the world. As a body-centered psychotherapist, I experienced my own embodiment as a place through which my clients and I could connect and from which I could elaborate therapeutic work with highly meaningful and lasting impact on both my clients and myself. While this was my own deeply felt experience, my sense was that other counselors and psychotherapists also experience somatic phenomena while working with clients. My research question emerged from my curiosity about the legitimacy of my assumption and my keen desire to learn more about other body-oriented mental health practitioners' embodied experiences. The heuristic approach allowed me to explore a phenomenon that, while deeply personal, may have universal significance among other similarly oriented psychotherapists. Likewise, the experience of designing the study was heuristic, as were the processes of seeking co-researchers, collecting and analyzing the data, evaluating the findings, writing the manuscript, and discussing the findings, in both social and professional settings, imbued as these processes were with self-dialogue, immersion, incubation, focusing, illumination, and other heuristic approaches.

One thing of which I was unaware (but of which I became aware quite quickly and abruptly) was the dearth of professional literature either describing or explaining the processes involved in conducting this type of research or presenting the findings of already completed heuristic studies. In my search for information, I came across a few articles depicting studies that had made use of the heuristic approach. What was confusing for me, at the time, was that while each study seemed to conform to the foundational phases and processes of the heuristic approach, the researcher of each study had also taken considerable creative license in both the execution of the research and its presentation. My primary (and only truly reliable) resources were thus the single book written about heuristic inquiry by Clark Moustakas (1990)—the man who originated the heuristic inquiry approach—and an article Moustakas coauthored with Douglass

(1985). With so few resources, I essentially took what I could and then used my imagination to invent my own path. It did not take me long to realize that my predecessors had likely done the same, thereby explaining some of the marked differences evident among the manuscripts of those studies. As I went about my dissertation research, I encountered a number of stumbling blocks in the research process that, with much patience and determination, I was able to work through. Nevertheless, as I dug deeper into my research process, the need for a comprehensive text describing heuristic inquiry became more and more apparent. Thus began a new heuristic process through which I playfully explored the idea of writing this book, even as I was closing out my dissertation study.

My journey with heuristic inquiry did not begin with my dissertation work, however. I have been a heuristic researcher, informally, my entire life and have used the heuristic approach throughout my life's journey to make sense of a number of phenomena that I personally experienced, each of which captured me with such force as to impact every interaction I had with both my inner and outer worlds. In such moments, I felt compelled to acquire a deeper understanding by dialoguing with myself and others who had experienced the same or similar phenomena. I have explored, within myself and with others, and written about the nature of human darkness and how we can use our own darkness to enhance resilience. This project resulted in creative synthesis in the form of a poetry chapbook (Sultan, 2014). I have studied the phenomenon of stuckness, largely inspired by my experiences of being physically stuck in the womb and delivered by forceps three weeks past my due date and being psychologically stuck in the hamster wheels—time and again—of unfavorable situations and damaging relationships. I have delved into perfectionism—its harms, its benefits, and its multifaceted manifestations—in both personal and professional settings. Because I am a poet, a natural outcome of these explorations was that the creative syntheses emerged in the form of poetry.

Additionally, I have spoken with many clinical colleagues and journaled about our shared narratives of embodied intersubjectivity and somatic resonance in the psychotherapy encounter. My doctoral dissertation study (Sultan, 2015) was a heuristic inquiry in which I explored therapist embodiment, a deeply personal experience that was (and continues to be) a critical component of my clinical work with psychotherapy clients and of which I wished to arrive at a deeper understanding and create some meaning. In fact, each of these explorations was inspired by my deeply felt personal experience of the topic, which makes

locating myself within the research process essential. After all, how do we hope to understand what we are researching if we fail—or *refuse*—to identify our connection to it?

The importance of the researcher's role has been minimized, diminished, and shamed for too long. We cannot possibly extract ourselves (or be extracted) from what we experience and what we research. As professional researchers, we cannot—*should* not—pretend we are not an integral part of the topics we investigate and explore. The very idea of value-free research is pure fantasy! Accordingly, it is our ethical obligation, and our duty as explorers of human experience and advancers of scientific inquiry and knowledge, to be transparent about our personal agendas. Contrary to a dated belief that any personal investment or inclination in a research endeavor on the part of the researcher compromises its validity, it has been my personal experience that identifying and clarifying the role of the researcher lends a study credibility and trustworthiness.

Finally, I view the research endeavor as a journey or quest for an unknown that is eagerly awaiting an opportunity to emerge into the light. A safe emergence of that unknown takes place within a cocreated, experiential, genuine *how* and *what* habitat of inquiry that is open and ready to unconditionally receive whatever materializes from whichever source. This requires a great deal of flexibility, creativity, and openness on the part of the research team. It demands, too, that all who are traveling the research labyrinth interact with the often-present ambiguity and confusion with curiosity, imagination, and nonjudgment; trust the process; and remain committed to seeing the journey through to its end, knowing that the end may be just another beginning!

Closing Reflections

As we journey together through this narrative, I invite you to allow yourself to be alert to words, phrases, exercises, symbols, or images that resonate with all dimensions of your being—that is, the cognitive, the emotional, the sensory∞kinesthetic, the perceptual, the spiritual, and the social∞relational. When you find them, pause and take a moment to attune to this experiencing gateway and to explore multiple discourses between and among your various perspectives. This not only gives you a flavor of some of the processes you will be using as a heuristic researcher but inspires you to create your own relationships with those processes. I also invite you, in genuine heuristic style,

to release any attachment to a specified expectation or goal, to question and sit with those elements of content that feel confusing, to trust and own your reading and learning journey, and to immerse yourself fully and holistically in this process. Shall we?

Acknowledgments

Forget safety.

Live where you fear to live.

~ Jalaluddin Rumi

Writing this book has been a life-transforming journey for me, and an exquisite one at that. This journey has also demanded of me one daring leap of faith after another—faith in myself, faith in my world, and faith in a number of gracious and generous beings who accompanied me, persistently and unfalteringly.

I am deeply grateful for the limitless support of the editorial team at SAGE. To Helen Salmon, my editor: Your trust in this process and in me was deeply affirming, and your backing of reenvisioning heuristic inquiry through this textbook was more encouraging than you will ever know. To Chelsea Neve and Megan O'Heffernan, Helen's editorial assistants: Your tireless attention to detail and precision was both graciously challenging and refreshing. It was a joy and an honor to work with both of you. Additionally, thanks to Meg Granger, copy editor, and Jane Haenel, production editor, for your tireless work editing the manuscript.

A great thank-you to the reviewers of my book. I am especially grateful to Graham Bright of York St. John University in the United Kingdom: Your constructive and gentle feedback was instrumental and invaluable. A very special thank-you to all members of the Clinical Mental Health Counseling Department and the School of Education and Human Services at the University of St. Thomas—especially to Elizabeth Maynard and Higinia Torres-Rimbau—for your support. Thanks, also, to Jeffrey Kottler: Your encouragement to me to follow my own path was heartening and invigorating.

I would like to thank my former instructors and mentors Ray Wooten, Melanie Harper, Dana Comstock, Julie Strentzsch, and Dan Ratliff: I've learned so much about research, teaching, and counseling from all of you. I am also very grateful to my students and my counseling clients: You keep me grounded—every day and every moment—in what really matters. I owe a special debt of gratitude to my former co-researchers: Our research journeys together have fortified and

enriched my knowledge and my being. Thanks, also, to my friends and colleagues Arline Didier, Regina Stowers, Donna Kapinus, Renee Turner, Fiorella Ventura, Cremilde de Oliveira, and Maureen Jones, for your priceless words, thoughts, and presence.

I wish to thank, from the bottom of my heart, my husband and best friend, Vincent Sanchez. We have been on so many life journeys together, from beginning to end ... to new beginning. Thank you for the quiet sacrifices and the tremendous emotional support you gave throughout this journey and give so generously every day. Thank you, also, for believing in me, and for accepting me and loving me just as I am.

The author and SAGE Publishing would like to thank the following reviewers for their feedback during the development process:

Graham Bright, York St. John University
Angela Eckhoff, Old Dominion University
Tera R. Jordan, Iowa State University
Joseph W. McNabb, Northeastern University
Gerardo Blanco Ramirez, University of Massachusetts, Boston
Claire Michele Rice, Nova Southeastern University

About the Author

Nevine Sultan

is assistant professor of Clinical Mental Health Counseling at the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas. She is also a licensed professional counselor in private practice, specializing in complex trauma, dissociative disorders, and grief. Nevine embraces an embodied phenomenological approach to research, education, and counseling/psychotherapy to enhance awareness and intersubjectivity and to support the integration of living experience and the creation of meaning. She is especially passionate about the relationally shared experience between researcher and co-researchers, instructor and student, and therapist and client, and the impact of embodied awareness on empathic presence and creative resilience. Her recent publications can be found in the *Journal of Humanistic Counseling* and the *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health.* She currently teaches graduate courses on human diversity; counseling theories; human growth and development; addictions and recovery; ethical, legal, and professional issues in counseling; and social justice. She is an avid meditator and creative writer.

1 What Is Heuristic Inquiry, Anyway?

What in your life is calling you,

When all the noise is silenced,

The meetings adjourned,

The lists laid aside,

And the wild iris blooms

By itself

In the dark forest ...

What still pulls on your soul?

~ Jalaluddin Rumi

Questions for Reflection

1. Why do I research human experience?
2. What is my role as a heuristic researcher?
3. What tools can heuristic inquiry offer me and my research needs?

At first glance, the words of Rumi appear as a question. Yet as we dwell with the essence of the words, we find, held within them, both an inquiry and a most tantalizing invitation to self-reflection, self-discovery, and self-transformation. Such is the domain of heuristic inquiry, which summons us to linger in silence and solitude, even as we are magnetized by the pull of life and the richness of the dark forest, and as we seek—both within and without—knowledge, meaning, and growth. Before we begin our journey of learning how to unravel the essential nature of human phenomena, however, it's crucial that we take a brief step back and connect with the origins of heuristic inquiry. We will then discuss the essential nature of this particular methodology, as well as its purpose, some of its defining characteristics, and some limitations and considerations to keep in mind when using this approach.

A Brief Recent History

Heuristic research started out more as an informal process of assessing and

meaning-making than as a research approach. Clark Moustakas (1923–2012), the originator of heuristic inquiry, stated that the approach came to him as he searched for a proper word to meaningfully represent certain processes he felt were foundational to explorations of everyday human experience (1990). The methodology itself was introduced in a more formalized manner to the world of research methods with the publication of Moustakas's book *Loneliness* (1961), in which he depicted his experience of that phenomenon as he dwelled with a decision tied to his daughter's need for heart surgery. Moustakas used his personal knowledge of and relationship with loneliness as a foundation for exploring the phenomenon in others.

While this may seem like a biased or "non-empirical" way of engaging a research topic in some research traditions, we now have rejuvenated understandings of empiricism that, while they actually date back to the most primitive attempts to operationalize the exploration of human experience, are reemerging due to their relevance to the needs of contemporary research. We will delve into this topic in greater detail in Chapter 3, but for now, we can say that much of formalized research includes a deeply felt conscious or unconscious personal interest in a particular topic the researcher has experienced in one or more contexts, and a communion between what the researcher already knows about the topic and what he is out to learn or discover about it from others who have also experienced it. As American philosopher David Abram (1996) reminds us, "The scientist does not randomly choose a specific discipline or specialty, but is drawn to a particular field by a complex of subjective experiences and encounters, many of which unfold far from the laboratory and its rarefied atmosphere" (p. 33). Research is, thus, regardless of its paradigm or orientation, a multicultural, contextual, intersubjective, and embodied act.

If we give it some thought, we may see that we are all engaging in various heuristic practices even if we do not formally name what we are doing *heuristic inquiry.* We are immersed in heuristic processes beginning with our very first efforts to learn—our preverbal experiences as infants—and continuing until the present moment of our lives. We are ceaselessly assessing what and how we sense, feel, and think about certain phenomena, while checking in with others to learn if they are experiencing them in different, similar, or the same ways, and then returning to ourselves to process all this information toward a more cohesive understanding. Heuristic inquiry acknowledges these experiences and includes them in the research process, making for a very personal and communal journey of discovery that

- includes a systematic though flexible research framework;
- engages self-searching and reflexive self-dialoguing;

- honors felt sense (Gendlin, 1981, 1996);
- stresses relationality, intersubjectivity, and "betweenness" (Buber, 1923/1970); and
- fosters integration.

In that sense, heuristic research is both art and science.

The term *heuristic* comes from the ancient Greek word *heuriskein*, "meaning to discover or to find" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9). Moustakas described **heuristic inquiry**[*] as a qualitative, social constructivist, and phenomenologically aligned research model (1990, 1994). In the context of social science and educational research, heuristic inquiry has also been identified as an autobiographical approach to qualitative research (Moustakas, 1990). Other descriptors and characterizations of heuristic inquiry that are not highly elaborated in the professional literature include the following:

- Exploratory, serendipitous, and discovery-oriented
- Process- and content-focused
- Intuitive, introspective, and reflexive
- Experiential, embodied, and holistic
- Existential and humanistic
- Culturally embedded and emancipatory
- Relational, authentic, and participatory
- Imaginative and creative
- Nonlinear, fluid, and flexible

[*] The definitions of bold terms can be found in the Glossary at the end of this volume.

Finally, a novel characteristic of heuristic inquiry that emerged from my dissertation research process is that it is the study of **living experience** (i.e., interrelated, interconnected, continuing experience) rather than the study of **lived experience**, which describes all phenomenological approaches and implies that human experiences are intermittent events that are disconnected from one another and that, once they are completed, are history (Sultan, 2015). Please see Table 1.1 for brief descriptions of the general characteristics and leanings of heuristic inquiry, all of which will be more fully explored throughout the text.

Phenomenologically aligned	*[description illegible]*
Autobiographical	*[description illegible]*
Exploratory, serendipitous, and discovery-oriented	*[description illegible]*
Process- and content-focused	*[description illegible]*
Intuitive, introspective, and reflexive	*[description illegible]*
Experiential, embodied, and holistic	*[description illegible]*
Existential and humanistic	*[description illegible]*
Culturally embedded and emancipatory	*[description illegible]*
Relational, authentic, and participatory	*[description illegible]*
	[description illegible]
Imaginative and creative	*[description illegible]*
Nonlinear, fluid, and flexible	*[description illegible]*
Living versus lived	*[description illegible]*

Table 1.1

As a method for investigating and exploring human living experience, heuristic inquiry was inspired by a number of theories and knowledge bases, including those

advanced by Abraham Maslow (1956, 1966, 1971), Martin Buber (1923/1970), and Edmund Husserl (1900/2001). It was especially influenced by Michael Polanyi (1958, 1966, 1969), whose writings stress tacit knowledge as the basis for all other forms of knowledge; Carl Rogers (1961, 1980, 1985), whose theories and approaches greatly inspired and informed the fields of psychotherapy and humanistic psychology due to their intensely relational and awareness-oriented dimensions; and Eugene Gendlin (1962), whose focusing body psychotherapy modality stresses the inner felt sense experience that is a significant component of heuristic research. In this newly revised approach to heuristic inquiry, the work of Martin Buber is brought into deeper focus as his explorations into the necessity of an I–Thou (versus an I–It) intersubjective approach to human relationships informs this volume's enhanced emphasis on the pivotal role of the relationship between researcher and research partners. The phenomenology of perception elaborated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945/2013) also links quite seamlessly with this heuristic approach through its emphasis on human interaction and meaning-making as temporal, embodied, and perceptual acts.

These historical figures and theories made a prominent contribution to the knowledge base of how we are in the world and how we understand both our individual and shared experiences through embodiment, perception, self-exploration, self-knowledge, and self-actualization. Hence, the self of the researcher and the researcher's perceptual field are key dynamics in the heuristic approach. "In its purest form, heuristics is a passionate and discerning personal involvement in problem solving, an effort to know the essence of some aspect of life through the internal pathways of the self" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 39). So what might distinguish heuristic inquiry from, say, autoethnography? Well, in autoethnography the search for understanding the essence of a topic of inquiry through the self is focused on *one* self—that of the primary researcher. In a heuristic study, however, self-research is but one dimension of the study. Focus on individual experience is a Eurocentric lens on research and may not address advancement and movement from the personal toward the universal. Thus, heuristic researchers explore their own internal pathways, as well as those of the selves of others, as we radiate from the personal domain of experiencing a phenomenon into the realm of the universal. With that, while such internal pathways may not always be clearly outlined, there is the inevitable moment of knowing one has arrived at the center of the labyrinth one is journeying and has attained illumination, only to begin a newly inspired heuristic journey. Figure 1.1 is a photo of a naturally etched environmental expression of the labyrinth. Figure 1.2 is a photo of the entrance of the walking labyrinth (a replica of the labyrinth of the Chartres Cathedral) located on the grounds of the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas, where I work.

Figure 1.1 A Knot in a Plank of Wood: A Labyrinth Carved by Nature, Upon Nature
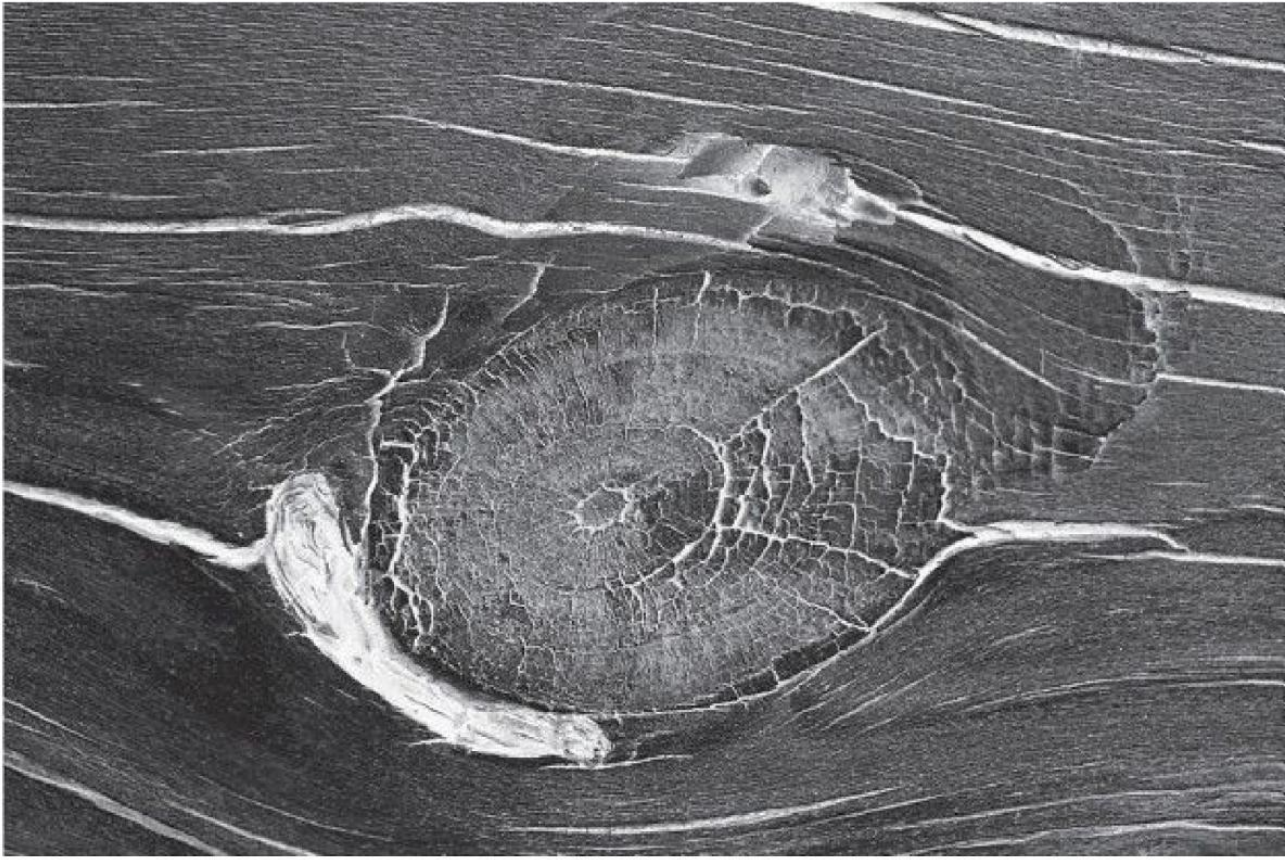
Figure 1.2 The Entrance of the Labyrinth at the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas: A Replica of the Labyrinth at the Chartres Cathedral

The Purpose of Heuristic Inquiry

Heuristic inquiry involves exploring the subjective experience of a particular phenomenon within a purposive sample of individuals. Heuristic researchers do not separate the individual from the experience but rather focus their exploration on the essential nature of the relationship or interaction between both. The central question asked by any heuristic research study is: *What is the experience of ... ?* A secondary question of focus in a heuristic study may be: *How do I/you experience this phenomenon?* As evident, both questions are open-ended, inviting further discourse and elaboration rather than confining co-researchers to specific, predetermined responses. As an example, the central topic of inquiry in the heuristic study I conducted for my dissertation (Sultan, 2015) was the experience of embodiment in psychotherapists. The core questions I asked of my research partners, all of whom were body-centered psychotherapists with a personal experience of embodiment, were as follows:

- What does it mean for you to be embodied?
- How do you use your embodiment within the therapeutic process?
- Can you share some clinical examples of how you use your embodiment in the therapeutic encounter?
- What is your perception of the impact of your embodiment on the clients you

work with?

Such questions demonstrate the central premise of heuristic inquiry—self- and other-exploration toward shared understanding of the essential nature of the core phenomenon, how it is sensed and experienced, and its significance to oneself, to others, and to the world.

You might be thinking, *I can ask these very same questions within a grounded theory study. So why heuristic inquiry and not grounded theory?* My simple response is that while we may ask the same or similar questions in studies conducted across various qualitative methodologies, the findings will vary (more on this in Chapter 2). For example, in a grounded theory study, the idea is to identify a theoretical understanding of a phenomenon through a group of themes that assimilate around a core theme, whereas in a heuristic study, the idea is to identify nonhierarchical themes that help us understand the essential nature of the phenomenon. Additionally, grounded theory and heuristic inquiry each follow their own unique process of inquiry that both informs and is informed by the research question(s). Finally, due to heuristic inquiry's humanistic background, it embraces a unique focus on holism and personhood—essentially, on what it means to be human.

Please see Box 1.1, which lists a number of heuristic inquiry research studies demonstrating the applicability of this singular research method across multiple disciplines. Some of these studies will be explored in greater depth in later chapters. In the meantime, I recommend looking up some of these studies and exploring the unique features that emerge through use of the heuristic methodology.

Box 1.1 Examples of Heuristic Research Studies

Alsobrook, R. F. (2015). *Yoga and emotional well-being: A heuristic inquiry into the experience of women with a yoga practice.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harold Abel School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Capella University.

Green, C. (2012). *The wild writer: A heuristic inquiry into the ecological writer's experience of nature.* Unpublished master's thesis, Prescott College, Prescott, AZ.

Holt-Waldo, N. Y. (2011). *The lived experience of being a holistic nurse educator: A heuristic inquiry.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Capella University.

Leiby, J. C. (2014). *Windows to the soul: A heuristic inquiry in the use of the eyes as portals to innate presence.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Sofia University, Palo Alto, CA.

Madden, E. M. (2015). *The lived experience of being spiritual for an atheist.* Unpublished

doctoral dissertation, Harold Abel School of Social and Behavioral Science, Capella University.

Moustakas, C. E. (1961). *Loneliness.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Pogge, S. M. (2013). *The experience of living with chronic illness: A heuristic study*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of Psychology and Philosophy, College of Arts and Sciences, Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX.

Sultan, N. (2015). *A heuristic inquiry of the embodied experiences of body psychotherapists in the therapeutic encounter*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of Counseling and Human Services, St. Mary's University, San Antonio, TX.

Whatley, R. J. (2015). *Pulling the arrows out of our hearts: An heuristic inquiry into the lived experience of internalized racism of African American women*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, Palo Alto, CA.

Essential Features

Apart from any altruistic or professional motives, heuristic studies are grounded in our personal experience and embedded within our personhood. Heuristic inquiry emerges from the researcher's **initial engagement**, or first encounter, with a topic of extreme interest through an autobiographical experience that, though it is internal and personal to you (the researcher), is potentially of social and universal significance. The experience is so deeply felt that it arouses one central question you are unable to ignore. In a manner of speaking, the general topic of inquiry chooses you, which is quite a departure from many traditional approaches to research whereby you go about a rather methodical selection and "pruning" of the research topic. This deeply felt phenomenon or experience becomes a point of encounter between your internal world and the external world in which the phenomenon is playing out and in which the research is taking place. In a way, the research question and the process of exploring it become a calling, a sort of invitation to enter the labyrinth and embrace the journey.

What does this mean for you? Once the question is found, your urge to find an answer must be set aside so you can embody and live the question fully. While it requires some degree of patience and engagement with the actual research process, this practice of **immersion** allows for the ambiguity that is a central aspect of the heuristic approach while releasing any attachment to a specified goal, finding, or outcome. It also lays the foundation for the central question or topic of inquiry to embody you and thereby inform the process of inquiry and discovery. Thus, we heuristic researchers adopt the attitude of *learner* versus *expert* as we connect fully

with the phenomenon being explored. We bring passion, curiosity, imagination, and vulnerability as we allow ourselves to be drawn into the rich banquet of the unknown, even while living it in all dimensions of our experience: in sleeping, in waking, in going about our day, in our interactions with others, in our dialogue with ourselves, and in any other encounters we may have. We open up our senses, our intuition, our thoughts, our feelings, and our awareness in our search for the qualities, conditions, and relationships that motivate our research question (Moustakas, 1990). We experience our entire way of being in the world—and are connected to ourselves, to others, and to the world—through the lens of our topic of inquiry. As Moustakas (1990, 2015) described it, the research question becomes a "lingering presence" (Moustakas, 2015, p. 309) as the researcher interacts with and encounters or cocreates new knowledge. See Figure 1.3 for a visual representation of this.

Figure 1.3 Topic of Inquiry/Research Question as a Lens for Being, Relating, and Knowing
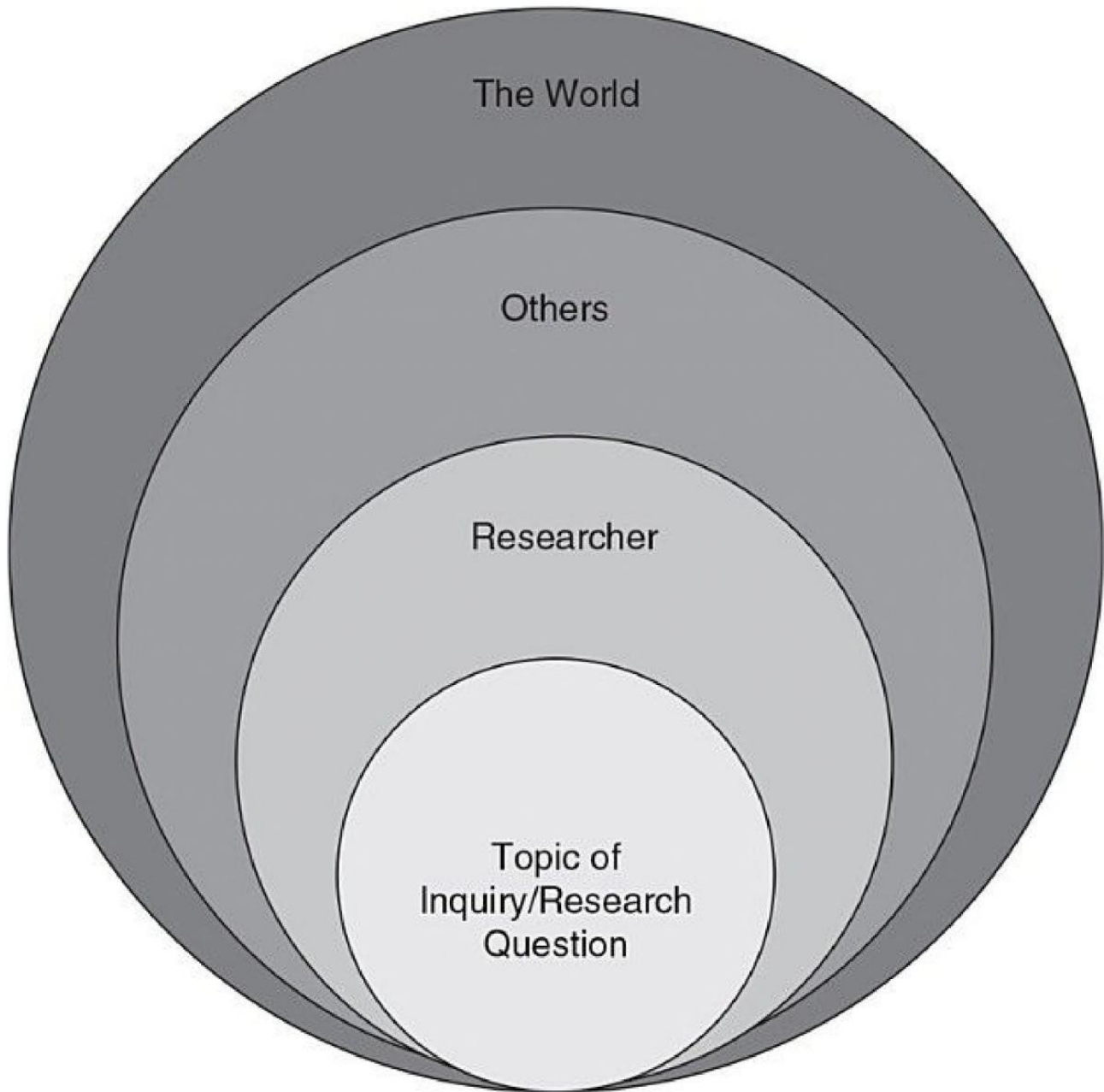
As you connect with varying dimensions of your experience (including interest, curiosity, openness, fascination, reflection, and various versions of the research question) and acquire novel information, you may need to step away every once in a while to allow this knowledge to incubate. **Incubation** is a process of care, cultivation, and growth that enhances and encourages insight, understanding, and integration. Paradoxically, then, to fully connect with this tacit, implicit dimension and what it holds about the topic of inquiry, you must be willing to sometimes surrender your intimate relationship with the topic of inquiry and your attachment to rigid time schedules. As Moustakas (2015) notes, "The heuristic process is rooted in experiential time, not clock time" (p. 318). Again, this calls for your willingness to be flexible with regard to a specific timeline or outcome (more on how to do this

realistically in Chapter 6) as you allow yourself to move back and forth between intimacy with and distance from the research question.

This can be quite scary and confusing, evoking a significant amount of fear and anxiety as you come face-to-face with uncertainty. On the other hand, if you are willing to truly surrender to the research process, there is the enormous and ever fascinating reward of being with whatever emerges serendipitously, as unexpected as it may be. In that respect, this process involves a high level of innate artistry in which you, the primary researcher, balance engagement and detachment, proximity and distance, tension and release, while remaining cautious not to become stuck on either end of these spectra. Throughout the course of the study, you go back and forth in a rhythmic dance between the processes of immersion and incubation, within and between a variety of contexts that nurture the knowledge that is about to emerge. In essence, you surrender to the labyrinth, with all its twists and turns, knowing that there is no right or wrong way to pursue that path. This flexibility of movement is guided by your internal subjective experience and in turn guides the research endeavor and the organic emergence of new knowledge throughout various phases of the inquiry, with the deeply felt question itself holding the capacity to inspire discovery, profound understanding, and transformation within all who come into contact with it.

The heuristic approach emphasizes the unraveling of the essential nature and meaning of a unique phenomenon through engagement in a number of internal processes in nonsequential fashion, including self-exploration and self-reflection toward **illumination**—that is, awareness, discovery, and deeper knowledge and understanding (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Sultan, 2015). It thus encourages the researcher's continued immersion and focused attention, and may evoke "the opening of wounds and passionate concerns" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 14) as you pursue a creative, existential journey that, while it originates within the self, has the potential for both personal and communal transformation.

Along similar lines, the heuristic approach demands engagement in external processes that involve dialoguing, interacting, and collaborating with others who have shared comparable or similar experiences toward jointly constructing new understandings of those experiences. This creative and relational process supports a healthy blending of boundaries and the formation of confluent spaces in which may emerge and linger exchanges with universal themes. Some qualitative methodologies stress the importance of story in this data collection phase. However, story implies the necessity of a beginning, a middle, and an end. In heuristic inquiry, although the organization of experience into a cohesive whole is critical, we researchers tend to relax expectations about arriving at a particular truth or

destination. Heuristic researchers are involved in an ongoing, nonlinear process of questioning, seeking, waiting, incubating, and receiving. When a moment of encounter occurs, the researcher is inspired with more curiosity, wonder, and questions, and the process resumes. Hence, the focus in heuristic inquiry is on relational, intersubjective, empathic discourse—both verbal and nonverbal, both personal and shared. This underscores ongoing communication and conversation, even past the publication of the manuscript, as readers from diverse backgrounds interact with the findings and engage in their own heuristic process.

Underlying all this are the individual and collective beliefs, values, and assumptions of the researcher, co-researchers, and readers of the findings, which are linked by cultural norms and practices, language, and other social structures. By this token, discovery is not created only through a structured, goal-oriented objective stance, but through the scintillating hope of empathic relationships that enable new knowledge to emerge uninhibited and uncensored, or even serendipitously. In this respect, heuristic inquiry fosters the possibility of community and communion and, through those constructs (paradoxically), the validation of personal experience and identity. Heuristic inquiry thus involves working with various dimensions of the psyche such as sensing, perceiving, imagining, remembering, intuiting, feeling, thinking, and judging (Churchill, 2005) within the here and now while highlighting unique personal experiences with universal significance.

All this being said, it is important to note that in heuristic inquiry, transformation happens because the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and thus has direct access to and intimate involvement with whatever is emerging throughout the course of the study. This includes not only the content of the data collected but the process of collecting the data, collaborating and interacting relationally with co-researchers, reorganizing previously held knowledge, and cocreating new meanings and representations. This means of engaging the process of inquiry shields the research process from becoming an automated and disembodied exercise of collecting information. It also involves openness and receptivity to data gathered through your own senses, and consideration of and responsiveness to verbal as well as nonverbal experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In fact, what Polanyi (1958, 1966, 1969) refers to as **tacit knowing**—that is, implicit knowing, or knowing that lies beyond what may be readily observed or articulated—is a highly valued concept of the heuristic approach (more on tacit knowing in Chapter 4). Consequently, heuristic inquiry is a nonreductionist, holistic research approach that concerns itself more with meanings than with measurements, with essence than with appearance, with quality than with quantity, and with experience than with behavior (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). Please see Box 1.2 for a summative description of the heuristic approach in Moustakas's (1990)

own words.

Figure 1.4 illustrates the interplay of some of the many processes that go into heuristic research.

Box 1.2 A Summative Description of the Heuristic Approach in Moustakas's (1990) Words

- "A process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge" (p. 9).
- "The heuristic process is a way of being informed, a way of knowing. Whatever presents itself in the consciousness of the investigator as perception, sense, intuition, or knowledge represents an invitation for further elucidation. What appears, what shows itself as itself, casts a light that enables one to come to know more fully what something is and means. In such a process not only is knowledge extended but the self of the researcher is illuminated" (pp. 10–11).
- "From the beginning and throughout an investigation, heuristic research involves self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery; the research question and methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning, and inspiration" (p. 11).
- "I begin the heuristic investigation with my own self-awareness and explicate that awareness with reference to a question or problem until an essential insight is achieved, one that will throw a beginning light onto a critical human experience" (p. 11).
- "In heuristic investigations, I may be entranced by visions, images, and dreams that connect me to my quest. I may come into touch with new regions of myself, and discover revealing connections with others. Through the guides of a heuristic design, I am able to see and understand in a different way" (p. 11).
- "In heuristics, an unshakable connection exists between what is out there, in its appearance and reality, and what is within me in reflective thought, feeling, and awareness" (p. 12).
- "I begin the heuristic journey with something that has called to me from within my life experience, something to which I have associations and fleeting awarenesses but whose nature is largely unknown. In such an odyssey, I know little of the territory through which I must travel. But one thing is certain, the

mystery summons me and lures me to let go of the known and swim in an unknown current" (p. 13).

- "Heuristics is a way of engaging in scientific search through methods and processes aimed at discovery; a way of self-inquiry and dialogue with others aimed at finding the underlying meanings of important human experiences.... This requires a passionate, disciplined commitment to remain with a question intensely and continuously until it is illuminated or answered" (p. 15).

Figure 1.4 The Heuristic Research Process
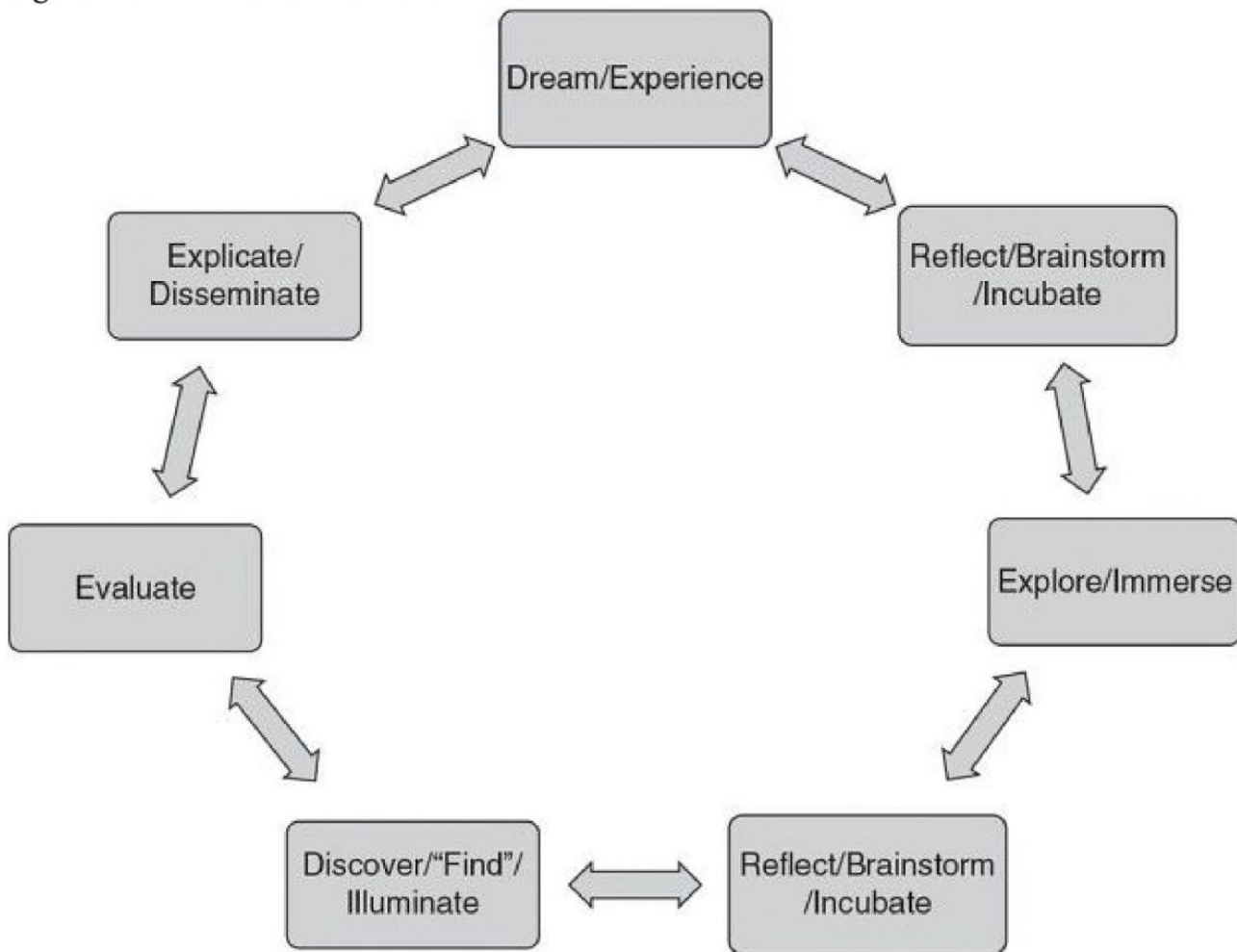
I also invite you to try out Exercise 1.1, which allows you to sense into and express your current understanding of heuristic inquiry.

Exercise 1.1 Sensing Into and Expressing a Rough Understanding of Heuristic Inquiry

- Find a composition notebook or sketchpad to use as a journal as you read this book; journaling is a key practice embedded within the heuristic approach.
- Take a deep, conscious breath. Exhale slowly and fully. Repeat this. Take your

time.

- Find your center of gravity and connect with it. Take another deep, conscious breath.
- Without looking back at Chapter 1 or ahead to any of the other chapters, and without setting a time limit to your process, write as many words, phrases, or concepts, as you can generate that are associated with heuristic inquiry.
- Also note or draw any symbols or doodles that come into your awareness.
- Write and draw without censoring your thoughts, feelings, or body sensations. Allow these experiences in your process. Do this until you feel you have exhausted your source.
- Look at all the words and phrases on your page. Read them aloud while attending consciously to the experience of speaking the words and hearing your voice. What do you experience as you articulate those words?
- Look at the symbols and doodles. What is it like to see them? Using the tips of your fingers, trace each symbol. What do you experience as you do this?
- Bring your awareness to any thoughts, emotions, or body sensations that emerge. Make note of each of your experiences—again, without censoring or judging.
- Are you able to bring an attitude of curiosity, openness, and nonjudgment to your experiences?

Example of thoughts: I wonder where that doodle came from; what does it mean?

Examples of feelings: sadness, anger, joy

Examples of body sensations: tight chest, trembling hands

Processes and Phases

Moustakas (1990) outlined seven concepts and processes involved in the researcher's journey of arriving at a deeper understanding of the central question through heuristic inquiry:

- Identifying with the focus of inquiry
- Self-dialogue
- Tacit knowing
- Intuition
- Indwelling
- Focusing
- Internal frame of reference

In addition to these processes, there are six phases of heuristic inquiry that are

curiously similar to Graham Wallas's (1976) stages of the creative process:

- Initial engagement
- Immersion
- Incubation
- Illumination
- Explication
- Creative synthesis

These processes and phases will be described in greater detail in Chapter 4.

As is evident from the processes and phases engaged in this unique research approach, heuristic inquiry encourages the reduction of deliberate, forced effort designed to arrive at absolute truths. It instead highlights the importance of taking a holistic and creative approach to the process of inquiry and engaging in it with genuine curiosity, openness, tolerance for ambiguity and the unknown, patience, and non-attachment to specified outcomes. This supports a fluid and flexible form and structure in all dimensions and stages of a research study that is consequently highly process- and content-oriented and that supports dialogical interaction between preexisting knowledge of the topic of inquiry and new information emerging from connecting with research partners and content on a profoundly relational and experiential level.

Because the phenomenon being explored in a heuristic inquiry emerges from the autobiographical and often intensely personal experience of the primary researcher, during the evolution of the heuristic inquiry phases and throughout the course of the study, it is your ethical responsibility to reflect on and process your experience through reflexive and reflective exercises such as journaling, artwork, meditation, role-playing, body movement, and poetry, or through consultation with peers and/or supervisors (more on this in Chapter 10). Many qualitative approaches discuss the concept of reflexive **bracketing** of the researcher's experience throughout the course of a study. Bracketing of personal experience is highly regarded in qualitative research circles, as it helps researchers critically assess, recognize, and suspend or set aside some of their personal motives and values, with the objective being to minimize the imposition of such values on the research process. This is critical, as bringing our assumptions or preexisting theories into any process of inquiry may compromise it as we attempt to confirm what we already *know* to satisfy a particular hypothesis or the need to be right. Entering into a research endeavor with a preestablished idea about the findings is an egotistic trap in which we may get caught as we attempt to protect the false edifice of our knowledge. As Tulku (1987) stated, "The *attitudes* we adopt in carrying out our

investigation shape the *attributes* we find in the world we investigate" (p. 307).

While heuristic inquiry appreciates the significance and noble rationale behind bracketing, it also underscores that bracketing should not result in elimination of researcher values, with the understanding that the elimination of value biases is a fallacy (Ponterotto, 2005), especially in such a personally motivated research endeavor as that undertaken through a heuristic process. Additionally, given that heuristic inquiry is inspired, in the first place, by an autobiographical experience, it seems unrealistic to even pretend engaging in the elimination of personal values. Essentially, you experience what you perceive to be an extraordinary and captivating phenomenon and seek to create what meaning you can of it through both internal and external discourse. Heuristic inquiry enables you to do this.

Heuristic research values your personal interest and stresses the importance of the topic of inquiry being internally located versus attempting to satisfy the traditional requirements of empiricism by identifying the researcher as an unbiased, unconcerned observer. In fact, trying to embrace the role of a distant and detached bystander in heuristic research may create opportunities for you to dabble in your bias within the safety of your professed detachment. To what end? Thus, in heuristic inquiry, the purpose of bracketing and reflexivity is not to abstract the researcher from the research but instead to enhance researcher awareness as to *how* to approach the research question and process of inquiry. The idea is to allow researchers to honor and take ownership of their personal experience, to invite researchers to challenge and explore what they think they know, to extend transparency and minimize deception, and to enhance the trustworthiness of the research. In essence, as a heuristic researcher, I do not bracket myself *out of* my research studies. Instead, I bracket myself *into* the process of inquiry. As I *out* my personal interests, motivations, and agenda, I *in* myself within the study. Along those lines, I am able to bring my authentic embodied self into the research process to be present with the authentic embodied selves of the co-researchers as both process and outcome are co-constructed. New knowledge is jointly created as a shared embodied experience between me and my co-researchers. Thus, as the primary researcher, I pay particular attention to the dynamics of privileging one perspective over others and to potentially losing sight of the fact that each contribution is of worth as a bearer of knowledge and a living experience.

The rigor of the heuristic approach is generated through observation of and dialoguing with self and others, especially through in-depth interviewing (Moustakas, 1990, 2015), usually of a **purposive sample**—that is, one that targets a particular group of people based on their experience of the phenomenon being explored. In addition to interviewing, heuristic inquiry invites the inclusion of

artifacts such as journal entries, artwork, musical compositions, photos, and other forms of creative expression, from both the researcher and research partners. Through openness to the experience itself and to new ways of viewing it, **indwelling** (turning inward) and intuition, shared intensity of the experience with co-researchers, and shared inquiry and reflection with co-researchers, the researcher arrives at insight into the central phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990; Patton, 2002). This creates a sense of connectedness as researcher and research partners collaborate to illuminate the nature and essence of the topic of inquiry (Patton, 2002).

Limitations of Heuristic Inquiry

Like all other research approaches, heuristic inquiry has its strengths and its limitations. The many strengths and unique characteristics of heuristic inquiry have been outlined both implicitly and explicitly, thus far, and will be highlighted throughout this text. However, in the interest of fostering ethical and rigorous qualitative research, it is also important to note some of the limitations of heuristic inquiry and to address some ways to mitigate potential negative impacts on the research process. As a holistic researcher and person, I view the fact that heuristic inquiry has limitations as a sign of its intrinsic health. I also view the limitations not as a deterrent to successful research but as an instrument the researcher, co-researchers, and readers of the findings may use to enhance their creative interaction with the information they are processing. Working creatively and intuitively with challenges may, in and of itself, yield powerful and transformative experiences. So then ... limitations:

- *Heuristic research is not for objective folks, nor is it for those who are not creative.* First of all, we are all creative beings. We all enjoy some spirit of imagination and love for the original. If you have ever daydreamed, you are creative. If you have tried your hand at another resolution to a problem that seemed to have only one way out, you are creative. If you have to survive, on a day-by-day basis, in this world, you are creative. You get the picture. As for the objectivity piece, heuristic inquiry invites both nearness and distance, both intimacy and detachment. Remember, it's all about maintaining the flow of the dance between the seeming polarities of experience.
- *Researchers may experience roadblocks as they try to define or refine their research question.* This will happen! I am not saying it *may* happen but that it *will*. This is a natural consequence of your personal engagement, on an intense level, with the phenomenon being explored. As you attempt to understand your experience, questions saturate both your inner and outer landscapes, as well as everything in between. Once again, I remind you to open yourself up to the sheer deluge of stimuli and to allow yourself to become immersed in it while

using your self-awareness to recognize when it is time to step away and let things incubate. I also would like to caution that we researchers know precisely what it is we want to explore. However, we may taint our desire with self-doubt, social conformity, and fear of failure. Embrace all of this, I say! Eventually, the true question that burns within you slow and blue will emerge into your awareness, fully and forcefully.

- *Researchers may, during the process of immersion in the data, feel lost and never attain illumination.* Heuristic researchers often feel lost. So do other quantitative and qualitative researchers as we travel our research journeys. You are both permitted and encouraged to feel lost while acknowledging that this sense of loss of direction is but an ornament that embellishes the research process and makes it richer. Feeling lost means that we must seek other ways to get back on track. In your search for your correct path, sometimes you will come upon hidden trails you never would have dreamed of finding otherwise.

- *The final findings or manuscript may not yield any new or definitive information.* True. However, how do we define what is definitive and what is not? Whether or not something is definitive is quite subjective, as is whether or not something is new. Additionally, your topic of inquiry will hardly ever be an anomaly. Someone has already asked the very questions you are asking, although perhaps within a different context. Thus, individuals who come into contact with the findings will go through their own exploratory process of how they experience the findings and what those findings mean for them, expanding the horizons of every heuristic study into the present-moment way of being of those who interact with it. This speaks to the living process and universal significance that characterize both heuristic inquiry and human experience.

- *Some researchers, research partners, or readers of the findings may feel more perplexed after their participation or reading experience than before it.* Absolutely. On the other hand, one of the finest qualities of heuristic inquiry is its invitation to open ourselves up to the confusion that may emerge as part of both the participation and the reading experience. Remember the last time you felt confused about something and, rather than continuing to fight it until it drove you nuts, you decided to just let it go? What happened next? You remember. Remain dedicated to working your way through the labyrinth. Eventually, you will reach the center and work your way back out.

- *The heuristic research process may reveal more differences than similarities.* Agreed. Then again, heuristic inquiry celebrates difference. If it did not, heuristic researchers would direct their eyes only to their bellies and accept whatever "truths" emerged from that process as The Truth. In fact, more heuristic researchers than not like to include research partners in their studies. Take a

look at the list of heuristic studies I have included in Box 1.1 and you will see what I mean. Honoring difference allows us to highlight similarity.

- *The research findings may not be easily generalizable due to the small number of research partners.* I'd like to remind you about finding the universal within the particular and vice versa. A parallel concept is finding the typical within the singular and vice versa. Finally, as a psychotherapist who is often exposed to vicariously shared experiences with my clients, I cannot help impressing on you that many dimensions of what you share with readers will resonate and arouse within them questions, thoughts, feelings, and sensations that will inspire them toward their own new directions and horizons. This, too, is part of the fluid nature of heuristic inquiry and human experience.

- *The research findings may not result in any social action or change.* This particular limitation evokes the question, *How do we define social action and change?* Many of us imagine advocacy and social action as conduct that both demands and produces decisive social transformation. On the other hand, solid and enduring change often requires time and happens in small chunks, while change that takes place rapidly may be short-lived. In that vein, if even one person is transformed in some small way by either participating in the research process or interacting with the findings, then the wheels of lasting change are in motion.

I can keep going on about the limitations of heuristic inquiry. But I think you probably see how my experiencing process works and how I embrace a good challenge. I invite you to engage a similar process with some of the challenges you will likely face as you carry out any type of research, be it qualitative or quantitative, heuristic or otherwise. Embrace your creative self and make sure that part of you stays anchored to you, around you, inside you—always!

Closing Reflections

Moustakas (1990, 2015) reminds us of the open-endedness of heuristic research, asserting that each research journey should be allowed to emerge in its own unique way. The flexibility of the heuristic approach makes it highly adaptable and, thus, ideal for researching a diversity of topics across disciplines, and phenomena that are vague or difficult to observe, measure, or document. Going about heuristic research using a rigid step-by-step outline would fly in the face of its fluid and inventive nature and undermine its spontaneity. The beauty of the heuristic approach lies in its systematic but improvisational method of conducting scientific inquiry while incorporating the self of the researcher, thereby allowing us to explore our most meaningful and significant life experiences without succumbing to the inhibitions and structures imposed upon traditional empirical research methodologies. It

invites any and all manifestations of the topic of inquiry: within the researcher; within individual co-researchers; in the shared experience between and among one, the other, and the world; in journal entries, artwork, poetry, or other forms of creative expression; in letters, photos, or other artifacts; in previously published findings; in the content of dreams or other altered states; and in verbal and nonverbal discourse. It welcomes questions that have been shunned, neglected, or avoided in research (and in society) and embraces populations that have been oppressed, discriminated against, or marginalized.

Through its existential and humanistic philosophical foundations, heuristic research views human experience as embodied and relational, and acknowledges the human potential for self-actualization. It thus creates a space for the magic that happens when researcher and co-researchers come together in shared curiosity and open ourselves up to becoming enchanted and transformed, not only by findings embedded in real-life experience but by the pull of the process itself on our souls. As we inch closer to the singular, living features of a person, place, or phenomenon, the universal—ever so tenderly—unfolds!

2 Locating Heuristic Inquiry Within Contemporary Qualitative Research

You will come to a place where the streets are not marked.

Some windows are lighted, but mostly they're darked.

A place you could sprain both your elbow and chin!

Do you dare to stay out? Do you dare to go in?

How much can you lose? How much can you win?

~ Dr. Seuss

Questions for Reflection

1. How is heuristic inquiry related to phenomenological research?
2. How is heuristic inquiry discrete from phenomenology?
3. What makes heuristic inquiry unique from other qualitative approaches?

I have been an avid fan of Dr. Seuss's wisdom since my earliest years. The man had so many insights and sage perceptions, it's no wonder his books continue to capture the interest of readers well past their childhood years. The words above are from one of my favorites, *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* They invite and entice the reader to enter a liminal space of discernment between darkness and light and a host of other implicitly suggested polarities. At the same time, they challenge us to consider what we may gain or lose should we not accept the dare. But then, those words are so filled with the essence of exploration and adventure, how does one not take the plunge into the colorful spectrum held within them and there linger with the delicious confusion that comes with surveying all the tantalizing possibilities? Such is the spirit with which one embarks on a journey to explore the essential nature of a particular phenomenon. Such is the spirit with which one enters the labyrinth of heuristic research!

Now that we've covered the essential characteristics of heuristic inquiry, and before you begin your heuristic journey, it might be helpful to understand how heuristic inquiry shares some characteristics with phenomenological research and how it is also quite distinctive from phenomenology. Likewise, heuristic inquiry sits quite comfortably alongside a number of qualitative research methodologies such as grounded theory and narrative research, and approaches such as feminist research and transpersonal methods. More important, heuristic inquiry is an extremely versatile research methodology with numerous creative practices that may be used to incorporate unique angles from which to

approach the research process. With that in mind, it is useful to know how heuristic inquiry may be bricolaged with some of these inductive approaches to enhance qualitative researchers' processes of inquiry. I will focus particularly on bridges between heuristic inquiry and grounded theory, narrative research, and feminist research.

Relationship to Phenomenology

Heuristic inquiry is, at its heart, a phenomenologically aligned research approach in that it views the process of inquiry as a synthesis of science and art, and perception as the primary source of knowledge and truth (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2013) that cannot be doubted (Moustakas, 1994). In fact, Merleau-Ponty viewed phenomenology primarily as a way of being. Wertz (2005) added, "Phenomenology is a low-hovering, in-dwelling, meditative philosophy that glories in the concreteness of person-world relations and accords lived experience, with all its indeterminacy and ambiguity, primacy over the known" (p. 175). As a qualitative research methodology, phenomenology is concerned with uncovering the essential nature of a phenomenon and representing it using rich, layered, deep, and evocative narratives to capture the complexity of the phenomenon being explored. Likewise with heuristic inquiry, in which a central catalyst is the constant relationship between the researchers' internal perceptions, judgments, and memories and their external perceptions of reality. Hence, the phenomenon being observed is recognized only through the subjective experience of the person observing it—that is, through the researcher's and/or co-researchers' perception. In such a fluid and personal process of inquiry, truth is relative and there are no fixed outcomes or meanings (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2013). Such a process honors previous knowledge through the understanding that the topic of inquiry is not an aberration; it's possible that someone else has asked a similar question before. However, the unique circumstances involved in the current research project inform that process of inquiry and influence all outcomes. Curiosity and wonder saturate the research process as emergent perceptions bring into awareness novel perspectives uniting past, present, and future and deepening "what something is and means" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 54). First-person narratives and creative expression are the ideal methods for presenting the research findings.

Phenomenology is a complex approach to qualitative research, and a number of different methods of applying and using it have emerged as researchers have attempted to refine research processes aimed at meeting the needs of their topics of inquiry. Finlay (2011) outlined six approaches of phenomenological research:

1. *Descriptive/empirical,* based on Husserl's (1900/2001) philosophy; includes the method developed by Giorgi (2009); describes, using a generally scientific approach to data collection and analysis, the essence of an experience.
2. *Hermeneutic/interpretive,* based on philosophies by Heidegger (1927/2008) and Gadamer (1960/2013); includes methods developed by van Manen (1990) and Todres (2007); evokes lived experience through a philosophical, linguistic, and literary lens.

3. *Lifeworld,* based on philosophies by Heidegger (1927/2008) and Merleau-Ponty (1945/2013); includes a method developed by Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nyström (2008) and Ashworth (2003); explores an everyday experience as it manifests in the time–space continuum and in relation to others.
4. *Interpretative phenomenological analysis*, based on philosophies of Husserl (1900/2001) and Heidegger (1927/2008); includes a method developed by Smith (2004); focuses on individual perceptions and meaning-making of an experience.
5. *First-person,* based on Husserl's (1900/2001) philosophy; includes a wide range of methods such as narrative research, feminist research, and ecological research.
6. *Reflexive-relational,* based on various philosophies, especially those of Buber (1923/1970), Gendlin (1962), and Merleau-Ponty (1945/2013); includes the heuristic approach developed by Moustakas (1990); allows for the emergence and cocreation of data through the dialogical encounters between members of the research team.

Although heuristic inquiry has its foundations in phenomenology, Douglass and Moustakas (1985) distinguished it from phenomenology in the following ways:

- Heuristic inquiry honors relationship, while phenomenology stresses a certain degree of detachment.
- Heuristic inquiry invites creative elaboration of the findings as articulated through poetry, artwork, music, or other forms of creative expression, while phenomenology focuses on the distillation of experience.
- Heuristic inquiry embraces personal meaning, while phenomenology prefers structured experience.
- Heuristic inquiry highlights co-researcher essence, wholeness, and visibility, while phenomenology may lose research participants in the distillation of experience.

One further distinction between heuristic inquiry and phenomenology—and a rather critical one—is that in phenomenology it is not necessary that the researcher have had a direct personal encounter with the topic of inquiry, while in heuristic research this factor is essential.

A heuristic research journey is grounded in the researcher's intense personal relationship with the research phenomenon, and embodied attunement to and engagement with the process of inquiry. Thus, from an embodied perspective, heuristic inquiry involves six core perspectives from which the researcher engages the central question:

- Sensory∞kinesthetic
- Perceptual
- Social∞relational
- Emotional
- Cognitive
- Spiritual

These dimensions are inseparable from one another, as one's sensory∞kinesthetic experience, for example, impacts how one feels about, thinks about, and interacts/relates with a particular occurrence. Additionally, other playful facets for interacting with the research question include intuiting, imagining, anticipating, believing, and remembering (Ray, 1994). This dynamic, holistic approach transcends the usual and preferred (though highly fragmenting and marginalizing) dualistic Cartesian mind-over-body method, in which detached observation is privileged over all other ways of knowing or is viewed as the only way of knowing. Thus—and along the lines of Merleau-Ponty's (1945/2013) embodied perceptual phenomenology—we both influence and are influenced by all of what happens within and around us. Through such an intentional process of inquiry, we become active agents in the creation of meaning and being versus receivers of others' modes. In that vein, heuristic inquiry is an emancipatory methodology (more on this in Chapter 7).

It is imperative to note that while some heuristic studies may take a self-research direction, heuristic inquiry is not necessarily or exclusively a self-research approach. It is also important to recognize that self-research is all about exploring subjective experience from a single perspective or lens—that of the researcher. There is nothing wrong with that, but that is not necessarily the perspective or vision of heuristic inquiry. Moustakas (1990) asserted that although it is feasible to conduct heuristic research with only one person, studies will attain deeper, more varied meanings when they include the experiences of others. To imagine otherwise is, I daresay, leaning toward the arrogant, as it assumes that only the experience of the researcher is valid, which is dismissive of others' experiences of a potentially universal phenomenon. The purpose of this research approach is to describe the essential nature of a particular experience, with the idea of moving from the unique to the universal. Keeping with this logic, how is it possible to identify the universal nature of an experience when one is exploring it exclusively from one's own perspective?

Similarly, heuristic research is not intended to be self-centered, self-indulgent, or narcissistic, nor should it be used to impose the researcher's experience on co-researchers or readers of the findings. Doing so would constitute a denial of the existence of the world around us and its impact on how we organize and make sense of experience, shattering the philosophical foundation on which heuristic inquiry is erected. Rather, heuristic research includes the self of the researcher as a necessary constituent of the process of inquiry in open acknowledgment of the researcher's personal experience of the phenomenon being explored and his pivotal role in the process of inquiry. As Patton (2002) explains it, the heuristic approach "epitomizes the phenomenological emphasis on meanings and knowing through personal experience" (p. 109), personalizing the process of inquiry and placing the researchers' experiences and insights at the center of the research endeavor.

Nevertheless, the researcher is never viewed as omniscient, as other sources of knowledge include research partners, the social context, and the multiple systems within which the

phenomenon is taking place. One can say, rather, that the researcher's experience acts as a frame of reference for co-creating novel understandings of the living experience that is being explored (Moustakas, 2015), with the main purpose being to comprehend it profoundly and holistically. Hence, although there is no explicit emphasis on advocacy or social action in the heuristic method outlined by Moustakas (1990), heuristic inquiry honors the intersection of the personal with the mutual and of the mutual with the social context. See Figure 2.1 for a visual representation of this experience.

Figure 2.1 Heuristic Inquiry Lies at the Intersection of the Personal, the Mutual, and the Social Context
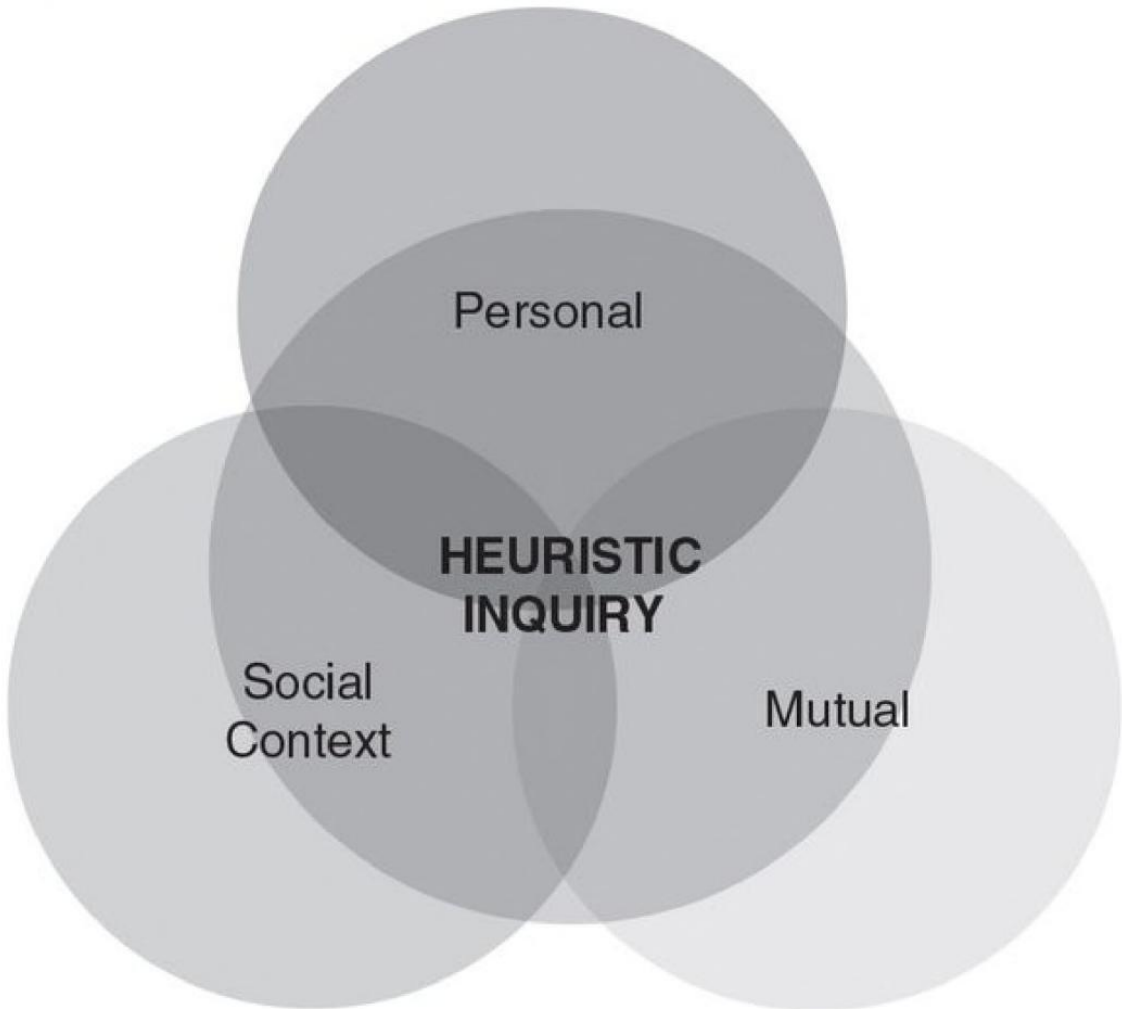
Ultimately, heuristic inquiry allows us to transcend the specifics of personal experience and move toward the universally shared essential meanings of the topic of inquiry while maintaining the wholeness of what was shared within the research process, as well as the wholeness of those individuals who shared it. In Chapter 3, I elaborate further on the phenomenological foundations of heuristic inquiry. See Table 2.1 for a side-by-side comparison of phenomenology and heuristic inquiry.

Table   2.1

Phenomenology	Heuristic Inquiry
Detached subjectivity toward the topic of inquiry and participants	Full immersion within the topic of inquiry and collaboration with research partners
Bracketing to set aside researcher values	Bracketing to identify the role of researcher values
Distillation of lived experience	Identification of essential meaning(s) of living experience articulated through creative expression
Participants superseded by the distilled elements of the topic of inquiry.	Co-researchers or research partners remain visible and whole within the essential meaning(s) of the topic of inquiry.
Somewhat linear research process	Nonlinear research process
Focus on structured experience	Focus on personal meaning
Personal experience with topic of inquiry is not required.	Personal experience with topic of inquiry is essential.

Source: Adapted from Douglass & Moustakas, 1985.

Bricolaging With Similar Qualitative Approaches

I speak four languages fluently. Thinking and communicating using a variety of languages opens, for me, multiple windows from which to view a single landscape. How I conceptualize a certain issue or question in English, for example, is quite different from how I conceptualize it in Arabic. Language is discourse embedded in and informed by culture, society, history, nature, and the body. Language also informs each of these entities. Additionally, language transcends verbal communication. Along the same lines, I am a true believer in the inclusion of all dimensions of human experience (cognitive, emotional, sensory∞kinesthetic, perceptual, spiritual, and social∞relational) toward understanding and integrating the living world. I have learned to interweave my various perspectives not only that they may enhance one another but also to synthesize all of them to arrive at a cohesive perspective that represents and honors my polydimensional, quadrilingual self. From this angle, quantity may foster diversity. On the other hand, quantity may also foster confusion. Given the myriad qualitative methods currently accessible to both novice and seasoned researchers, it is no wonder that researchers often find themselves lost at the crossroads of which method to adopt for their research,

especially considering the many similarities among these methods. Additionally, the shifting perspectives, within qualitative research, on the permeability of qualitative research methodologies and the potential to borrow and exchange approaches are opening doors to explore old questions from novel angles.

With an eye on the current turn in qualitative research to **bricolage**—or piece together—multiple perspectives, practices, techniques, or tools (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), following are brief individual descriptions of grounded theory, narrative research, and feminist research, along with accompanying discussions of how heuristic inquiry both is distinct from and may be used in conjunction with each approach to advance more flexible and fluid qualitative research paradigms that address the needs of specific topics of inquiry. Naturally, heuristic inquiry may be bricolaged with a variety of other research approaches and methodologies; however, to attempt to address all these is beyond the scope of this text. It is my hope that the qualitative approaches I have focused on will provide some inspiration and ideas for bricolaging with other qualitative approaches. My aim here is to underline the exceptional contribution of heuristic inquiry not only as a research methodology but also as a process of discernment (Hiles, 2008b) and to highlight how various components of heuristic research may be used to enhance or inform each of these other qualitative processes of inquiry. This is done with the understanding that your topic of inquiry and your central research question will facilitate your selection of an appropriate research methodology. Your central research question is the center of your labyrinth and your guiding light!

Grounded Theory

Essential and Distinguishing Features

Grounded theory is a qualitative methodology for developing a theoretical understanding of the topic of inquiry directly from the data from which it is emerging, rather than through preformulated ideas (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In that sense, grounded theory "refers simultaneously to a method of qualitative inquiry and the products of that inquiry" (Charmaz & Bryant, 2008, p. 375). Data are collected in systematic but flexible form (Charmaz & Bryant, 2008) through interviews or observation, as well as in the form of various artifacts, including journals, artwork, and historical records (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This format is similar to the data-collection process used in heuristic inquiry. In heuristic inquiry, data collection and analysis intertwine within a confluent process completed for one co-researcher at a time as researchers immerse themselves in each individual data set to acquire an intimate knowledge and understanding of it. Similarly, in grounded theory, the data-collection and analysis processes are conducted simultaneously and inform and influence one another throughout the course of the study in a process of *constant comparison*. Kathy Charmaz (2014) eloquently described the process thus:

Grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting

and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves....
Grounded theory begins with inductive data, invokes iterative strategies of going
back and forth between data and analysis, uses comparative methods, and keeps you
interacting and involved with your data and emerging analysis. (p. 1)

Whereas the heuristic approach developed in the discipline of humanistic psychology, and
in response to a question regarding the nature of the specific autobiographical experience
of loneliness (Moustakas, 1961, 1990, 2015), the grounded theory approach, originated by
Glaser and Strauss (1967), developed in the discipline of sociology to explore the
awareness of dying (Glaser & Strauss, 1965) and as a contest to the formality of separating
the data collection and analysis phases of a research process. Additionally, grounded
theory presented a challenge to the quantitative bent that seemed to create barriers
between theory and research (Charmaz & Bryant, 2008) rather than integrating those
constructs. As with heuristic inquiry, special emphasis in grounded theory was placed on
multiple perspectives, inductive approaches, and emergent processes.

A number of features distinguish grounded theory as a qualitative approach, the most
important of which is its focus on using the emergent data to inform the research sample
and to both inform and saturate theoretical categories, which are then assimilated around
a core category that represents the major theme of the study (Charmaz & Bryant, 2008).
This is a departure from other qualitative forms of inquiry, in which the research sample
is usually predetermined (unless snowball sampling or something similar is used for
specific reasons) and in which saturation occurs when new data that are gathered provide
no further insight (Creswell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It is also a marked difference
from heuristic inquiry, in which purposive selection of a maximum variation sample is a
preferred sampling method, the aim being to select individuals who have an intimate
relationship with the topic of inquiry (Wertz, 2005) while allowing for identification of
common themes that transcend co-researcher differences (Creswell, 2013). Another
notable difference is grounded theory's use of a hierarchical structure for organizing the
various categories of data that have been critically analyzed, interpreted, and coded. In
heuristic inquiry, there are no hierarchies; all data are attributed equal value, with some
data serving, perhaps, as constituents of other data while retaining equal importance.
Additionally, the heuristic researcher generally refrains from using critical analysis or
interpretation, as the main focus is to identify from the data the holistic essence of the
phenomenon being explored. Likewise, **coding**, a popular method for categorizing data in
grounded theory studies, is generally not used in heuristic inquiry, as the overall essential
features of the phenomenon emerge through the researcher's focused immersion in the
data and use of intuitive processes toward theme identification of the essential meaning of
the experience.

Corbin and Strauss (2015) shared several descriptions of grounded theory inspired by their
students' experience of this research methodology:

- Enjoyment of the mental challenge
- Openness and flexibility
- Relevance beyond academia
- Absorption in the work

As you read this book, you will recognize how some of these descriptors also apply to heuristic inquiry. While older versions of grounded theory viewed the researcher as fairly unobtrusive, newer models have been articulated—including *constructivist grounded theory* (Charmaz, 2007), which, not unlike heuristic inquiry, highlights the researcher's role in the process of inquiry, and *situational analysis* (Clarke, 2005), which combines constructivist concepts with postmodern ideas. Likewise, novel treatments of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2011) are similar to this reenvisioned version of heuristic inquiry in their inclusion of a focus on advancing social justice.

Bricolaging Grounded Theory With Heuristic Inquiry

What are some unique features of heuristic inquiry that may be infused into grounded theory to supplement it? One of the core characteristics of heuristic inquiry is its view of knowledge and reality as cocreated by researcher and research partners through a context-based understanding of their inner and outer experience of the topic of inquiry. This shared subjective attitude can provide a fresh perspective to grounded theory's traditional tendency to view reality as something outside of or separate from the researcher. Bringing the ideas of tacit knowing and felt sense into grounded theory allows for the infusion of higher subjectivity, providing an additional source of information with which to inform the process of inquiry. Grounded theory researchers may or may not elect to use any information gathered through their intuitive process. On the other hand, allowing that dimension to be present provides, once again, another source of knowledge acquisition and avoids fragmenting the research experience into various compartments with no apparent cohesion. Similarly, actively including the researcher's experience and encouraging researcher immersion in the data collection and analysis processes may mitigate the objective stance of the grounded theory researcher as detached explorer and enhance the rigor of the research process and findings.

Another key facet of heuristic inquiry that may balance the playing field in grounded theory is heuristics' inclusion of all aspects of the research experience as data, including artifacts from both researcher and co-researchers and whatever emerges during the data collection, organization, and analysis phases. Using this may balance the tendency of grounded theory toward abstraction, which can often marginalize particular dimensions of what is being explored, treating them as secondary variables or leaving them out of the knowledge pool altogether. Additionally, allowing every member of the research team to be a contributor means that understanding and meaning of the topic of inquiry emerge from the shared experience of all parties involved, without privileging either researcher or research partners. Grounded theory may also benefit from heuristic inquiry's lack of focus on identifying or constructing a theoretical model. While it is clearly the central goal

of grounded theory to generate theory, it may be helpful for grounded theory researchers to temporarily release this goal-oriented perspective and attend to the actual process of inquiry, with an eye on the broader landscape and wholeness of the phenomenon being explored and on its character as a unified and integrated entity (or at least as one that is working toward integration through the process of inquiry) to gain a different angle before returning to the main task of generating theory. This, again, provides information from another perspective, which the grounded theory researcher is then free to either include or not include. Finally, viewing all aspects of the research process within the various systems and contexts in which they are unfolding may complement grounded theory's recent interest in attending to social justice issues, unifying the multiple dimensions of both topic and process of inquiry.

Narrative Research

Essential and Distinguishing Features

Narrative research, not unlike many types of phenomenology, is about lived experience. The focus of narrative inquiry, however, is on the construction of reality through *stories* (Creswell, 2013) that are told, usually verbally, by research partners describing their individual experiences of the topic of inquiry within their life context. While heuristic inquiry actively includes stories or accounts of the phenomenon of inquiry, the focus in heuristic research is on the continuing verbal *and* nonverbal dialogue or discourse, both with and surrounding the topic being explored, in an effort to create meaning of the experience itself, rather than to reframe an existing narrative. Another core premise of narrative research is that reality is *individually* constructed through the narration of stories (Lichtman, 2014). Again, there is a similarity, between narrative and heuristic inquiry, in the social construction of experience, with a core difference being the stress on the individual nature of that social construction from the perspective of narrative research, despite the collaborative nature of the research process.

In essence, in narrative research, knowledge and meaning of a lived experience are illuminated through the recounting and interpretation of stories not unlike those written in the literary discipline. Butler-Kisber (2010) described the narrative structure as having six elements that are quite similar to the five elements of story used to describe the phases of plot in the literary tradition:

- Abstract (summary of the story)
- Orientation (time, place, participants)
- Complicating action(s) (stability-breaking event)
- Evaluation (meaning-making)
- Resolution (what happened)
- Coda (return to the present)

This is not unusual, as plot is very necessary to narrative research and, in a sense,

narrative research does view human experience as already lived.

Like grounded theory, narrative inquiry has its beginnings in sociology and anthropology (Chase, 2011; Kohler Riessman, 2008), in the collection and adaptation of the life histories and experiences of a variety of social groups. As with heuristic inquiry, narrative data is collected primarily through interviews and is supplemented by other documents and artifacts (Butler-Kisber, 2010). In fact, the heuristic interview is somewhat of a narrative interview, although it is but one part of a continuing conversation and is not necessarily privileged as the superlative source of data, as the interview is in narrative research. Like heuristic researchers, narrative researchers engage in a journaling process to facilitate examination of their assumptions, attitudes, and values (Chase, 2011). Unlike heuristic inquiry, however, though much in the manner of grounded theory, narrative research involves coding of categories in the data analysis phase. Due to the relational nature of the research process, and as with heuristic inquiry, the ethical considerations are quite critical, and narrative researchers are expected throughout the course of their research journey to remain alert and self-aware (Chase, 2011) so as not to compromise ethical standards. Additionally, and parallel to narrative research's focus on change, social justice is increasingly becoming a critical facet.

Narrative research, as mentioned earlier, tends toward interpretation by the researcher, whereas in heuristic inquiry, any meanings attributed to concepts or themes emerging from the research process are jointly constructed with co-researchers. The narrative researcher is usually in a position of authority, and this may tip the balance of equity in the research process. Additionally, narrative research honors the individual story (Chase, 2011), while heuristic inquiry views any individual contribution (including the researcher's) as but one exemplar of the topic of inquiry. Speaking of including the researcher, Kim (2016) named multiple approaches to narrative inquiry:

- *Autobiographical narrative inquiry*, in which the researcher's personal experience is the central topic of the study
- *Biographical narrative inquiry*, in which the focus is on stories about others
- *Arts-based narrative inquiry*, in which the findings are expressed in nonacademic form
- *Literary-based narrative inquiry*, which is written creatively or imaginatively
- *Visual-based narrative inquiry*, which uses visuals such as photos, collages, or paintings

Any and all of these models of narrative inquiry are not only acceptable but also necessary methods of heuristic inquiry and are readily included in all aspects of the heuristic research process as narratives, art, creativity, visuals, and other artifacts and sources of information are used to inform the study. For example, in heuristic inquiry, artifacts and the content of interviews have equal bearing as sources of data. Various forms of creative expression are used by the researcher to engage in reflexivity and to synthesize and explicate the co-constructed essential nature of the topic of inquiry.

Bricolaging Narrative Research With Heuristic Inquiry

While a number of core similarities exist between narrative research and heuristic inquiry, there are also some areas of divergence, as previously mentioned. A number of heuristic processes may be included in any narrative study, not with the purpose of modifying the nature, essence, or goal of narrative inquiry but to dabble with a variety of other approaches to enhance narrative data collection and analysis. One way of doing this is to view research participants more as partners or co-researchers. From this perspective, the relational subtleties of the research team are not open to interpretation but are honored as a prominent dynamic in the research process. Likewise, research partners are actively involved in all phases of the study and any tension created by perceived differences in power is mitigated. This empowers individuals to take ownership of their behaviors, thoughts, emotions, stories, and other dimensions of their experience and to take responsibility for their own change process. This is increasingly important as narrative research takes a more active interest in extending social justice (Chase, 2011). Another approach is to continue to honor co-researchers' narratives while also attending to nonverbal narratives as additional sources of information. Nonverbals can include not only some of the other methods of collecting data previously mentioned (artifacts such as journal entries, artwork, etc.) but also nonverbal behaviors of co-researchers such as tone of voice, gestures, posture, movement, and incongruent behavior as they share their experiences throughout the research process. These nuances offer critical information, in addition to the information shared through the verbal narratives.

Along similar lines, balancing the weight of the narrative interview with other data sources helps the research team access and connect with multiple iterations of the topic of inquiry and extends social justice efforts beyond the parameters of co-researchers' personal narratives. Other data sources, again, may include writing samples, memos, photos, poetry, journal entries, drawings or other artwork, and musical compositions, all of which are also part of research partner experiences. Including such data sources enables both the research team and readers of the findings to connect with the topic of inquiry through individual and collective interpretation of the material, rather than having others' socially constructed narratives imposed on them, many aspects of which may or may not fit with their own stories or experiences. This opens the doors for co-construction of reality whereby the research team offers multiple sources of knowledge regarding the topic of inquiry and their collective understanding of its essential nature, and readers of the findings interpret and establish connections with their own experiences of it. Finally, because interpreting others' information can be a slippery slope, why not expand efforts to jointly attribute meaning to co-researcher narratives and other forms of verbal and nonverbal expression, even during the data collection phase? In fact, narrative research can borrow from heuristic inquiry's humanistic and existential foundations that highlight positive growth and self-actualization to approach the entire research process as an exercise in reenvisioning narratives toward personal transformation, with a caution to researchers not to impose predetermined social justice

agendas on their research partners. Again, this highlights heuristic inquiry's humanistic-existential attention to empowering others toward self-advocacy and self-growth.

Feminist Research

Essential and Distinguishing Features

Feminist research is more a research approach than an actual methodology with step-by-step phases or processes. It uses gender as a lens through which to view social issues (Hesse-Biber, 2014), with the primary aim being to unravel power structures and struggles (Giroux, 1982; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Olesen, 2011) to motivate marginalized and oppressed populations to evaluate their lives and take action toward social change. Thus, while the primary focus of heuristic inquiry is to illuminate the essential nature of an experience, the core aim of feminist research is to illuminate social injustices, particularly as built on the foundation of male value systems (Gilligan, 1982). Due to the nature of the focus of inquiry, feminist researchers, not unlike heuristic researchers, embrace flexible research paradigms that may produce various forms of data. However, in feminist research, gender is a primary category of inquiry (Hesse-Biber, 2008, 2014; Lather, 1991), and its intersection and interaction with other elements of culture (such as ethnicity, race, ability, and socioeconomic status) are explored as researchers seek to highlight issues of power and authority, not only within the structure of the topic of inquiry but also within the research process. Like heuristic inquiry, feminist research uses the practice of reflexivity to shed light on the role of power and authority between the researcher and co-researchers.

Feminist research is evaluated based on its ability to generate action toward positive social change. Thus, while the research process is important, it does not play as critical a role as in heuristic inquiry. Instead, in feminist research the success of the research is determined by the outcome. In that vein, feminist researchers adopt either qualitative or quantitative methodologies (Hesse-Biber, 2008, 2014), depending on the needs of the research and the anticipated and/or hoped-for outcomes. Throughout the research process, both narrative and discourse are taken into consideration as aspects of lived experience. More recently, traditional notions of empiricism that were previously lauded in feminist research are being criticized in some applications that value the role of emotions, breaking down some of the positivist dualism that seemed to characterize it. Newer models of feminist research (Harding, 2004; Smith, 1990) tend to reject the adoption of single ways of seeing the world (Holzman, 2011), highlight lived experience as the basis for knowledge (Hesse-Biber, 2014), and explore the dynamics of difference, including such issues as sexual orientation, ethnicity, ability/disability, and geographic location (Olesen, 2011).

Bricolaging Feminist Research With Heuristic Inquiry

There is no doubt of the noble and dignifying intentions of feminist research. However, every research approach has limitations. In the spirit of bricolaging qualitative research

methods toward enhancing the quality, rigor, and trustworthiness of all research efforts, following are a number of suggestions for complementing feminist research with some heuristic processes. Given that a primary area of focus for feminist researchers is the advancement of social justice, it is important for researchers to pay particular attention to the ethical considerations of practicing action and advocacy toward social change and transformation. One of the characteristics of heuristic inquiry is authenticity. Authentic research is inclusive and equitable. Feminist researchers, like all other researchers, are motivated by personal needs and wants. To keep the research process authentic and balanced, special attention must be given to the feminist researcher's agenda and personal investment in the topic of inquiry, the research process, and the expected or desired outcomes. Thus, the focus on researcher reflexivity should be highlighted as feminist researchers examine their values, beliefs, and biases in the interest of not imposing any advocacy and/or social justice agendas on their participants. Failure to identify a hidden agenda motivated by personal interests is potentially dangerous and unethical (more on this in Chapter 10).

Speaking of participants, while feminist researchers give special consideration to issues of power and authority between themselves and their participants, co-researchers are still referred to as *participants* rather than as *co-researchers* or *research partners*. Changing the words we use in our research efforts also changes how we embody the research process and experience it. That is, when I name individuals who are commonly referred to in the research tradition as *research participants* my *co-researchers* or *research partners,* my brain and body eventually begin to experience them as such. I no longer view them as objects or as vessels of experience from which I am seeking knowledge but as living, breathing humans with a holistic way of being in the world. Along similar lines, feminist research may benefit from the holistic approach adopted by heuristic researchers, as inequity, power, and marginalization are explored not only as social∞relational experiences but also as cognitive, emotional, sensory∞kinesthetic, perceptual, and spiritual experiences. Taking this holistic perspective moves feminist research away from its own brand of marginalization that privileges the social∞relational self and allows for a more equitable research process that engages all dimensions of human experience.

Finally, with their attention to the outcome of the research, some feminist inquirers may get caught up in attaining their goal while losing sight of the potentially empowering nature of the very process and content of the research for all individuals involved. With this in mind, feminist researchers can borrow from heuristic inquiry's intimacy with the research process and content, the quality of the dialogue and discourse between researcher and co-researchers, and any and all types of data as they emerge on their own, rather than following a predetermined trail to acquire prescribed knowledge aimed at adopting or justifying a particular stance.

Closing Reflections