Qualitative Research as Methodical Hermeneutics

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The proportion of publications of qualitative research in mainstream psychology journals is small. Thus, in terms of this important criterion, despite its recent rapid growth, qualitative research is marginalized in psychology. The author suggests that contributing to this situation is the lack of a coherent and unifying methodology of qualitative research methods that elucidates their credibility. He groups the many qualitative research methods into 3 main kinds, then applies to them 4 propositions offered as such a methodology: (1) Qualitative research is hermeneutical, entailing application of the method of the hermeneutic circle to text about experience and/or action. (2) Implicit in the use of the hermeneutic circle method is the activity of educing and articulating the meaning of text, an activity that modifies and interacts with C. S. Peirce’s (1965, 1966) logical operations of abduction, theorematic deduction, and induction. (3) The cycling of these 4 moments enables demonstration, achieved rhetorically, of the validity of the understandings resulting from the exegesis of the text under study. (4) This demonstrative rhetoric is enhanced when researchers disclose reflexively those aspects of their perspectives they judge to have most relevant bearing on their understandings. The author compares abduction as formulated here with other recent uptakes of it. As an installment on the generality of the methodology, he explores its fit with the descriptive phenomenological psychological method, conversation analysis, and thematic analysis.

Keywords: qualitative research, hermeneutic circle, C. S. Peirce’s theory of inference, abduction, demonstrative rhetoric

In the last 45 years, there has been a dramatic development of qualitative research methods. These methods involve the discovery-oriented analysis of verbal text, the returns from which are given as verbal text. If numbers are used at all, it is to indicate the frequencies of the constituents of the returns. The methods are intensive, necessitating the study of a smaller number of individuals than is customary in quantitative research.

Although it has been traced to Freud’s use of the psychoanalytic interview (Kvale, 1999), as a genre, qualitative research came into existence much later. It entails basically three kinds of method. The first, what I call the “experiential” kind, involves the conceptualization of meanings of experiences whether reported by participants or inferred through participant observation. The conceptualizations take the form of either structures, narratives, themes, categories, or combinations of these forms. Prominent members of this kind are the descriptive phenomenological psychological method (Giorgi, 1975, 1985, 2009); heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990); interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith, 1996; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009); narrative analysis (Josselson & Lieblich, 1993; McLeod & Balmoutou, 1996, 2006; Polkinghorne, 1995), including Schütze’s biographical analytic version of it (Riemann & Schütze, 1991; Schütze, 1983); the grounded theory method (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998); and consensual qualitative research method (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). Adding to the diversity of this first kind have been methods fashioned out of either a constituent of an established method or a mix of constituents drawn from more than one method (see Rennie & Fromm, in press).

The second kind of method, which I name the “discursive” kind, is applied to study of the pragmatics or function of language-use. Conversation analysis and discourse analysis mainly make up this kind. Both of these methods are indebted to ethnomethodology originated by Garfinkel (1967) to study assumptions people use implicitly when interacting in daily life. Conversation analysis, developed by Sacks (1972; Silverman, 1998), is directed to patterns of relation describing conversationalists’ speaking turns, whereas discourse analysis (e.g., Parker, 1998; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) involves delineation of social values interpreted to be taken up wittingly or unwittingly by conversationalists, public speakers, and writers. There are varieties of conversational analysis and discourse analysis as well (Ibanez & Iniguez, 1997).1

This classification leaves as main methods thematic analysis (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006) and the case-study method (e.g.,

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1 In the experiential kind of qualitative research, the experience of action is put in the picture either inferably or explicitly depending on whether action is observed or the actor talks about it (see, e.g., Strauss, 1987). In contrast, conversation analysis and discourse analysis address linguistic (inter-)action of communicants wherein the actor’s cognition (i.e., experience) is often dismissed by the analyst (see Sanders, 2005).
Elliott, 2002; Frommer & Langenbach, 2006; Stiles, 2003; for a survey, see McLeod, 2010). These methods have been applied to either experience or discourse and thus constitute a third, “experiential/discursive” kind.

The number of methods has burgeoned. Recently Madill and Gough (2008) listed 32 of them without being exhaustive, as they noted. Meanwhile, books have been devoted to qualitative research, societies and journals have been created for it, and many established professional societies have made room for it.

Whether or not qualitative research has made an impact on mainstream psychology depends on how it is viewed. Willig and Stainton-Rogers (2008) have claimed that it is increasingly endorsed in the United Kingdom, observing that the British Psychological Society now requires accredited degree programs to include training in qualitative research methods, and that some U.K. funding agencies are beginning to favor mixed-method (i.e., qualitative and quantitative) research proposals. Nevertheless, in a study of appearances in PsycINFO and Dissertation Abstracts International of several search terms having to do with qualitative research, a research team led by me found that during the 20th century, the number of appearances of the search terms in the titles and abstracts of British and Irish publications was similar to that of American and Canadian publications when the populations of the two regions were taken into account (Rennie, Watson, & Monteiro, 2002). This study also showed that although the publications containing the search terms increased dramatically in the 1990s, even then the proportion of these publications out of the total number of publications was very low. Moreover, in only 10% of 315 of what we judged to be psychology journals were there five or more hits of the search terms in all volumes of the given journal, and only a few of these journals are solidly in the mainstream. Similar returns have come from related studies (Kidd, 2002; Marchel & Owens, 2007; Michell, 2004; Munley et al., 2002; Ponterotto, Kuriakose, & Granovskaya, 2007). Meanwhile, the uptake of qualitative research in Germany and Scandinavia appears to have been even less (Rennie & Frommer, in press). Thus, although there is no doubt that qualitative research has been increasingly looked upon favorably by psychologists in a number of ways, in terms of the important criterion of publication, especially in psychology’s mainstream journals, it is still on the margin.

In the interest of stimulating increased reception of qualitative research in the mainstream, in what follows I offer a methodology, or theory of method, that holds promise as a rationale for all qualitative research methods—and one that preserves the discovery-orientation that is the forte of qualitative research while teasing out intrinsic logical operations involved in its conduct that make its returns credible.

Before doing so, however, I give two examples of qualitative research, drawn from psychotherapy process research. The first is my study of the client’s experience of an hour of psychotherapy, which illustrates the experiential kind of qualitative research; the second is a case-study by Madill and Barkham (1997), exemplifying both the discursive and the experiential/discursive kinds.

Two Examples of Qualitative Research

(1) The Client’s Experience of an Hour of Psychotherapy

In my study, contingent on the agreement of their therapists, I invited clients in psychotherapy to join me in witnessing a replay of either an audiotape or a videotape of a therapy session they had just completed and to report resulting recollections of having experienced anything of interest or significance to them (Rennie, 1990, 1992, 1995b). This procedure was thus an application of the technique of interpersonal process recall (IPR), which Kagan (1984) developed for counselor training, to the study of the moment-to-moment experience of an entire hour of therapy (cf. Angus & Rennie, 1988; Elliott, 1986).

I conducted 16 of these IPR interviews with 14 participants, having interviewed two of them twice. I transcribed each IPR interview and, for context, the therapy session it was about as well. I analyzed the IPR transcripts as I went along. In conducting the analysis, I began by reading the given transcript to get a general sense of the participant’s recalled experience of the therapy session as a whole. I then broke the transcript into passages that seemed to have a main meaning, allowing that the given passage could be large enough to include fringes of meaning associated with that main meaning. These passages ranged from a few lines to two or three double-spaced pages in length. I interpreted the meaning(s) of the passage and represented each meaning as a category, whether created then and there or drawn from the list of categories I had previously conceptualized. I then assigned to the passage every category I interpreted to be applicable. This was my way of conducting the first phase of the constant comparative analytic procedure of the grounded theory method (Rennie, 2006; Rennie, Phillips, & Quartaro, 1988; cf. Turner, 1981).

To illustrate how this worked, here is a passage consisting of a participant’s comment on her therapist’s analysis of a dream the former had reported in her therapy session:

At this point I was trying to remember what kind of psychology that is—in the back [of my mind] like, is that kind of Jungian? What are the right responses to a Jungian-type psychotherapy session? Umm, I read mostly in fictional literature, like the Deptford Trilogy [by Robertson Davies], where things like that come into it, and also some Shakespearean things and I’m afraid to admit it but in the back of that moment I was trying—‘Oh, what’s the right response to that kind of therapy?’

I took this passage to mean that during this moment, the participant had been trying to ascertain where the therapist had been coming from. To represent this meaning, I created the category Client Understanding the Therapist’s Frame of Reference (CUTFR) and assigned this passage to it. Later, I also assigned the passage to Meeting Perceived Therapist’s Expectations.

To manage the analysis of the many passages excerpted from the IPR transcripts, I condensed the meaning of each passage into a gist a line or two long. In this case, the condensation was “Client tried to remember, from what she had read, the approach the therapist was using in interpreting her dream.” I typed it onto an index card devoted to this particular category, giving the gist an identifier so that I could trace it to its source.2 When the dust had settled, I had assigned 51 passages derived from 11 IPR transcripts to CUTFR (Rennie, 1992). To illustrate, below are four condensations, the above one plus one derived from the IPR transcript of each of three other participants (the identifier gives the location, among the

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2 The labor involved can now be eased through use of software such as ATLAS.ti (Muhr, 2004).
1,118 passages excerpted from the 16 transcripts, of the passage from which the gist was derived; a pseudonym of the participant; and the passage’s number out of the total in his or her transcript).

469F22: C tried to remember, from what she had read, the approach the therapist was using in interpreting her dream.

657J2: C didn’t know what T meant by “For sake of accuracy”; was lost.

881Su50: C didn’t know if T knew C wanted reassurance; however, T did good.

1023Sa24: The big question for C was: is T’s head clear?

It can be seen how the shades of meaning evident even in the condensations of the passages support and enrich the category. When writing up the study, I found that my immersion in the material was such that reading the condensations brought back my recollection of the full contents of the passages and that, correspondingly, scanning the condensations helped me to select the best passages to illustrate a given category.

(2) Discourse Analysis of a Theme in One Successful Case of Brief Psychodynamic-Interpersonal Psychotherapy

An example of both the discursive and experiential/discursive kinds of qualitative research is the discourse analytic case-study by Madill and Barkham (1997), also addressed in Madill (2006). They examined extracts from transcripts of an eight-session course of successful psychodynamic-interpersonal psychotherapy for treatment of a 42-year-old woman’s clinical depression. Her situation was that after spending 17 years caring for her senile mother, she had recently decided that she must put her into a care facility. The same case had been the beginning of their analysis of this extract as follows:

The client indicates her dutifulness toward her mother in several ways in this first extract. First, the length of time the client’s mother has been living with her. “Seventeen years” (Line 10) suggests a prolonged commitment even though the decision has now been made “that she has (upset) to go into permanent (whispered) care” (Lines 12–13). Second, indicating that the decision to place her mother in care has been “finally made” (Line 11) implies that it has been a drawn out process. The decision is therefore suggested to have been made reluctantly and with some consideration. Third, the client uses the phrase “permanent (whispered) care” (Lines 12–13) instead of “a home” or other alternative. Thus the importance of her mother being looked after properly is emphasized rather than her just residing elsewhere . . . . (p. 235)

Although I cannot get into it here, a principle of discourse analysis is that what people say varies depending on the function it plays in the context in which the utterance is made. Accordingly, Madill and Barkham (1997) have showed that in an early session, the client had insisted that she could not remember her childhood; yet, in a different context in a later session, she had revealed that she vividly remembered a lot of it.

I now proceed to the methodology, which I present as four propositions. Following that, I make an installment on the exegesis that would be required to demonstrate the generality of the methodology by presenting a cursory analysis of its fit with a representative of each of the above three kinds of qualitative research.
Proposition 1: Qualitative Research Is Methodically Hermeneutical

Originally hermeneutics was applied to the interpretation of legal documents and Scriptures. Over the course of its long history, however, Schleiermacher (1768–1834) extended hermeneutics to interpretation of texts of all kinds (Sandage, Cook, Hill, Strawn, & Reimer, 2008). Schleiermacher had in mind written texts; however, following the more recent advent of language philosophies, oral texts have been included as well (see Ricoeur, 1981). Schleiermacher’s emphasis was on method, or methodical hermeneutics. The thrust of this methodical hermeneutics differs from that of either of two contemporary forms of hermeneutics. These are Gadamer’s (1960/1992) philosophical hermeneutics that emphasize the role played by tradition in the understanding of text, and the critical hermeneutics of Habermas (1968/1971, 1981/1987) and Ricoeur (see Hahn, 1995) directed to social emancipation (cf. Bleicher, 1962/1980; Thompson, 1981).

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) observed that methodical hermeneutics began in the 16th century when Flacius, a Croatian scholar who Latinized his name after moving to Germany, developed a method of interpreting Scriptures to support the Christian Reformation (Dilthey, 1996a). This is the hermeneutic circle method where the meaning of a whole text informs the meaning of its parts, and the meanings of the parts illuminate the meaning of the whole. Dilthey maintained that in making this innovation, Flacius was the first to use methodically the help to be gained from context, aim, proportion, or links when inferring the meaning of text and its passages.

When Schleiermacher took up this method, he held that the purpose of hermeneutics is to divine authors’ intended meaning, holding that the interpreter’s knowledge of authors’ backgrounds and the contexts of their writings enable interpreters to understand authors’ texts better than they were capable of themselves (Dilthey, 1996b). Dilthey judged this divination approach to be too subjective. Influenced by John Stuart Mill’s logic and Auguste Compte’s positivism, and being critical of introspective philosophizing such as what he saw in Nietzsche’s writings, Dilthey held that the same logical operations are applied in the natural and human sciences (on the idea of human science, see Proposition 3, on demonstrative rhetoric, below). These are the operations of induction, analysis, construction, and comparison.

Dilthey recommended that induction can be made objective in two main ways. The first is to pay attention to familiar grammatical and syntactical arrangements and to the more or less determinate meanings of words, and to make use of art objects, artifacts, and architecture as objective indicators of historical events and personages. The second way is to compare other wholes to an individual whole to aid understanding of the latter (Dilthey, 1996b; Rickman, 1979).

There are three things that I find wrong with Dilthey’s recommendations. The first is that he allowed his concern about objectivity to get in the way of Erlebnis, or lived experience, which he championed in his contribution to the idea of human science. The second is that he was more interested in understanding particular historical persons and events than in inductively developing general understandings from particulars. The third shortcoming is that he underplayed the role of imagination in the hermeneutic circle method.

The following proposition allows this method to be applied not only to lived experience but also action, including the pragmatic use of language. Moreover, it does so in a way that offers a better depiction of the logical operations involved in the hermeneutic circle, one of which in particular amply involves imagination.

Proposition 2: The Hermeneutic Circle Method Involves Eduction That Modifies and Cycles With Abduction, Theorematic Deduction, and Induction

Among those contemporary thinkers who have either written on methodical hermeneutics specifically (e.g., Betti, 1962/1980) or on what amounts to it (Hirsch, 1967), the position taken by Hirsch (1967) is most in keeping with this proposition. When writing on validity in interpretation, Hirsch has observed that the act of understanding a text is at first either a genial or a mistaken guess at its meaning. In his opinion, there are no methods for making guesses, or rule for generating insights, but the methodical activity of interpretation begins when we begin to test and criticize our guesses. Once made, the guess is tested via qualitative probability. He has written,

We reach those meanings entirely on the basis of our judgment that such meanings will occur more often in an instance of this sort than will other meanings, and we are able to make this inference because we have concluded that the instance is of this sort (i.e., class) rather than another sort. If we could not subsume the unknown meanings under a class on the basis of what we already know, then we could not make such an inference. (Hirsch, 1967, p. 178)

Hirsch (1967) has concluded that the discipline of hermeneutics is not founded on the logic of construction but rather on the logic of validation. I think it is founded on both. His formulation can be strengthened when the activity of eduction is brought into the picture and in a way that modifies and interacts with the logical operations formulated by Peirce (1965, 1966). These are the operations of abduction, what he called “theorematic” deduction (Peirce, 1966, p. 124), and induction. I begin my development of this second proposition with consideration of eduction.

Eduction

Among the definitions of eduction is the following: “The action of drawing forth, eliciting, or developing from a state of latent, rudimentary, or potential existence; the action of educing (principles, results of calculation) from the data” (Oxford English Dictionary, Compact Edition, 1971, p. 834). More elaborately and relevantly, a dictionary of philosophy gives the following definition:

Eduction, the process of initial clarification, as of a phenomenon, text, or argument, that normally takes place prior to logical analysis. Out of the flux of vague and confused experiences certain characteristics are drawn into some kind of order or intelligibility in order that attention can be focused on them (Aristotle, Physics I). These characteristics are often latent, hidden, or implicit. The notion is often used with reference to texts as well as experience. Thus it becomes closely related to exegesis and hermeneutics, tending to be reserved for the sorts of clarification that precede formal or logical analysis. (Suppe, 1999, p. 253)
When applying the hermeneutic circle method, meaning is drawn forth. In qualitative research, a meaning judged to be relevant to what is being studied is represented by a string of words. The string may consist of few words when a category or more when a structure, narrative or theme.

Understanding the activity of educing the meaning of text benefits from Eugene Gendlin’s writings on the creation of meaning and how it is embodied (Gendlin, 1962, 1997). Gendlin has taken up Dilthey’s notion of lived experience while seeing it as a process, whence he has applied it to the gerund, experiencing (see Gendlin, 1997). Gendlin has maintained that our experiencing of ourselves and the world involves an embodied felt sense of meaning. This felt sense has much to do with the lingual forms we use, but not entirely: Experiencing also involves embodied feelings, sensations, and images. Such meaning may be inchoate in that it has a presence or implicit form within us calling for development through precise articulation. We search for the right words in quest of this precision. Sometimes the search is rapid and seemingly automatic but the testing of the articulation goes on all the same. At other times the search is deliberate, where various strings of words are tried for size. In response to each string, we have a sense of the correctness of the fit (Gendlin, 1991).

Gendlin’s favorite examples of the creation of meaning are the experiencing involved in creating a poem, and a client’s exploration of personal meaning when in conversation with a therapist. Thus, in the production of a poem, every completed line implies the next line. In responding to this implication, poets create strings of words while working with their embodied felt sense of meaning until they come up with a string that best articulates the implication. The activity continues until the poet judges the poem to be finished.

In his experiential phenomenology, Gendlin’s attention has been directed to individuals’ creation of meaning. Although he has drawn on Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology (Gendlin, 1978/1979), Gendlin has paid no attention to methodical hermeneutics. Nevertheless, his formulation applies well to what methodical hermeneuticists do in that they use their embodied experiencing when creating the meaning of interpreted text (Rennie & Fergus, 2006).

**Peirce’s Theory of Inference and Its Application to Methodical Hermeneutics**

A friend of William James, Charles Peirce was a polymath who wrote much on logic wherein he developed a theory of inference to account for the conduct of modern natural science. The theory involves primarily abduction supported by what he named “theoretical” deduction (Peirce, 1966, p. 124; see below) and induction.

In Peirce’s view, science involves enquiry guided by a sense of what is to be expected. During its course, the scientist may encounter an unexpected, surprising finding. The scientist then imagines a cause that, if true, would explain the finding. Peirce variously called this activity hypothesis, retroduction, and abduction, finally settling on the latter more than the other terms (Brent, 1998). He called it “nothing but guessing” (Peirce, 1966, p. 137). More formally, he put it into an argument:

The surprising fact, C, is observed.

But if A were true, C would be a matter of course.

Hence, there is reason to suspect that A is true. (Peirce, 1965, p. 117)

In Peirce’s view, abduction is the sheet anchor of science (Tursman, 1987). Curd (1980) has suggested, however, that there is a deficiency in the above abduction argument. Observing that Peirce wrote extensively on probability theory, Curd has proposed that Peirce unintentionally diluted abduction when putting it into the logic of probability. In Curd’s judgment, what Peirce meant to do was to put it into the logic of pursuit in order better to allow for the creativity involved in it. Accordingly, Curd has made the following amendment:

The surprising fact, C, is observed.

The hypothesis, A, is capable of explaining C.

Hence, there are prima facie grounds for pursuing A. (Curd, 1980, p. 214)

Meanwhile, Peirce was led to conceptualize theorematic deduction having endorsed the observation made by Kant and others that the Aristotelian syllogism (e.g., All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Therefore, Socrates is mortal) is tautological because the meaning of the conclusion is contained in the premises. The consequence is that this form of deduction, which he called “corollarial” deduction (Peirce, 1966, p. 124), does not move science forward, unlike his theorematic deduction. A theorem is defined in the *Oxford Shorter Dictionary* as

[... speculation, theory, (in Euclid) proposition to be proved ... be a spectator, look at ... THEOR.] A universal or general proposition or statement, not self-evident (thus dist. from an AXIOM), but demonstrable by argument (in the strict sense, by necessary reasoning): “a demonstrable theoretical judgement.” (*Oxford Shorter Dictionary*, 1987, p. 2280)

Peirce observed that theorematic deduction makes room for a lemma, or an assumption that something is the case, and allows for the innovation that science requires.3

He coordinated abduction, theorematic deduction, and induction in the following way. After imagining, through abduction, a cause that would explain a surprising finding, scientists theoretically deduce an experiment to test the abduction. They proceed to gather data resulting from the experiment, thereby shifting the enquiry into induction. This induction may lead to more surprising findings calling for new abductions. Abduction, theorematic deduction, and induction are cycled in a program of enquiry progressively approximating truth. As observed by Tursman (1987), Peirce worked out a way of making induction self-correcting.

Several years ago, I saw implications of Peirce’s theory of inference for methodical hermeneutics as a methodology of the grounded theory method of qualitative research (Rennie, 1998, 2000). I also expressed tentative thoughts about its wider applica-

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3 In my initial application of Peirce’s theory of inference (made most in Rennie, 2000), I missed his distinction between corollarial and theorematic deduction and took his dismissal of what I now understand to be the former, only, to be a dismissal of deduction entirely. I thus assumed by mistake that for Peirce, the testing of a hypothesis involves only induction, that is, without its initiation by deduction.
bility (Rennie, 1999; Rennie & Frommer, 2001). Especially attractive was Curd’s amendment of Peirce’s abduction argument, an amendment that I modified as follows to make it applicable to methodical hermeneutics:

The (interesting, surprising, etc.) passage of text, C, is encountered.

The meaning, A, of C may apply to the text as a whole.

Therefore there are prima facie grounds for pursuing A. (Rennie, 2000, p. 490)

Notice that in this argument, the symbols, C and A, are meant to be analogous to those in Curd’s formulation.

It now seems to me that eduction needs to be taken into account. It is through eduction that the meaning of a text is drawn out prior to its articulation as a concept whether in the form of a structure, theme, category, and so forth or a combination of them. I have also come to realize that the abduction argument needs to account for entry into the hermeneutic circle through either the whole or a part of text. Thus, taking the term text to mean generically either a whole text or part of it, the argument now becomes:

The interesting, surprising, significant, and so forth, meaning is educed from text, C.

The concept, A, created to articulate the meaning of C may be both accurate and applicable to the text as a whole.

Therefore there are prima facie grounds for pursuing A.

The other two constituents of Peirce’s theory of scientific inference—theorematic deduction and induction—follow from my modification of his abduction argument. The theorematic deduction is that evidence bearing on the abduction should be found in either the text as a whole or parts of it, depending on how the hermeneutic circle is entered. Specifically, it is deduced that upon entering the circle via a text as a whole, exegesis of parts of the text should produce evidence bearing on the accuracy of the concept ascribed to the whole text. Conversely, when the circle is entered through a part of a text, it is deduced that exegesis of the whole text should produce evidence bearing both on the accuracy of the concept articulating the meaning of the part and on the generality of that concept in the text as a whole. As for induction, in methodical hermeneutics this is the actual search for such evidence, through study or exegesis of text.

The alternative ways of entering the hermeneutic circle can be seen in the above two examples of qualitative research. In my study, I entered the circle through a given part of a text and used the whole text to test the category or categories conceptualized hypothetically to represent the meaning(s) educed from the part, and where the whole text included not only the IPR transcript from which the part was taken but also the corpus of transcripts. In contrast, it seems clear that Madill and Barkham (1997) educed and conceptualized the three subject positions they ascribed to the client from the whole text made up of all of the extracts that they drew from those therapy transcripts they used. After that, they tested the subject position they selected by analyzing the meanings of parts of the text.

The conceptualization of meaning has more to do with understanding than with explanation, which is a leap, given Peirce’s focus on explanation. Nevertheless, an understanding may also be explanatory. For example, in my study I came to understand that clients in a therapy session often gave the impression of being happier with how the therapist conducted the therapy than they felt. They suppressed their discontent because they attributed authoritative expertise to the therapist, whereupon they were reluctant to criticize the therapist, forgave her or his mistakes, and so on. This understanding led me to conceptualize the category, Clients’ Deference to the Therapist, a category that was supported and elaborated as the study proceeded (Rennie, 1990, 1992, 1994). As an understanding, it helps to explain such compliance.

As mentioned, when Peirce’s theory of inference is applied in natural science, a given application of induction may lead to a new surprising finding necessitating another cycle of abduction, theorematic deduction, and induction. In methodical hermeneutics, the eduction and articulation of a new meaning adds the resulting concept to the set of concepts under study, and the cycling of the three modified moments of Peirce’s logic is carried on until all concepts are dealt with in one way or other.

Specifically, out of the cycling there may be any of several outcomes, in terms of a given concept. The cycling may support it, enriching its meaning (cf. Rennie, 2009; Stiles, 2009). Or the cycling may lead to re-conceptualization of it. Or the concept may be judged close enough to a different concept to warrant pooling the former into the latter. Or the cycling may fail to yield sufficient evidence to support the concept whence it is dropped from analysis. Eventually the cycling leads to stability of all conceptualization in the interpreter’s judgment, at which point the enquiry may be brought to a close.

Other Contemporary Uptakes of Abduction

Recently, Peirce’s abduction has been taken up by several methodologists and some have applied it to qualitative research. For example, Shank (1994), too, has taken human experience and action to be text and has also advocated that, when interpreting a text, the meaning of the whole of it needs to be related to its parts. As a way of putting abduction in motion, he has recommended a tactic he found useful in his own research. This is the juxtaposing of what is to be explained and something else seemingly unrelated to it. Shank has found that exercising the juxtaposition stimulates possible explanations that might have been missed otherwise.

Other qualitative research methodologists have viewed abduction as not being about hypothesis as much as about the development of theory. They have recommended the use of existing theory to develop new theory (e.g., Kelle, 1995; R. Richardson & Kramer, 2006). Here, the grounded theory method has been focused on likely because, among the many qualitative research methods, it is foremost in being about the development of theory. Kelle (1995) and R. Richardson and Kramer (2006) have taken this position in virtue of the greater role Glaser (1978) and Strauss (1987) gave to extant theory in the development of new theory vis-à-vis where they stood on this question in their initial presentation of their method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The former methodologists have concluded that this shift by the originators of the grounded theory method makes it justifiable to use extant theory as a heuristic to develop theory in the conduct of this method, and have made such theory development part of abduction.

Finally, Haig (2005a, 2005b, 2008b) has made abduction into a theory of method, or ATOM. This theory is schematized as fol-
lows: (a) Phenomena are detected through a variety of strategies and methods. (b) Theory is generated either through exploratory factor analysis (EFA), the grounded theory method, or heuristics (described as the principle of the common cause). (c) Theory is developed through analogical modeling. (d) Theory is appraised by using any of a number of methods of making inference to the best explanation,\(^4\) such as the theory of explanatory coherence (Haig, 2005a, p. 373). In ATOM, Haig has endorsed EFA more than any other way of generating theory but, as indicated, has brought into play the grounded theory method as well. Meanwhile, ATOM has been criticized as being underdetermined by evidence (Romeijn, 2008), a charge that Haig (2008a) has rebutted.

Compared to the above uptakes of abduction, mine is the most radical in its being situated in the activities of educating meaning and articulating it, activities involving embodied experiencing. Correspondingly, this formulation makes abduction to be more broadly about the achievement of an understanding than the development of theory, although, like a theory, the understanding may provide explanation. Finally, the idea that extant theory can be used in the development of theory is accommodated because educating and conceptualizing the meaning of text allows for drawing on knowledge of any kind, including prior theory, so long as doing so is in keeping with the development of new understandings rather than merely the confirmation of old ones.

**Proposition 3: Qualitative Research Involves Demonstrative Rhetoric**

Rhetoric has been defined as “the rationale of the informative and the suasive in discourse” (Bryant, 1974, p. 239). Aristotle observed that in his time the (Platonic) distinction usually was made between demonstration (science), rhetoric (enthymeme), and philosophy (dialectic) as uses of speech and language (Lanigan, 1995). Aristotle narrowed the gap between science and rhetoric when holding that the latter can be demonstrative as well, in two ways. The first is by taking the enthymeme to be an analogue of the syllogism used in demonstration. The second is by using examples as an analogue of induction (Vickers, 1989).

The enthymeme is defined as “an incompletely stated syllogism, with one premise, or even the conclusion, omitted” (Boh, 1999, p. 267). Thus, for example, in the argument, “All men are mortal (major premise), therefore Socrates is mortal (conclusion),” omitted is the minor premise that Socrates is a man.

There has always been a connection between rhetoric and methodical hermeneutics. The groundwork was laid during the medieval period when rhetoric became an instrument in theology to “clarify the meanings and remove the ambiguities of scriptural statements” and to systematize collections of authorities, making discordant canons constant (Vickers, 1989, p. 282). Accordingly, Flacius drew on rhetoric when originating the hermeneutic circle (Dilthey, 1996b), and this connection has been retained to the present day (Eden, 1987; Hernadi, 1987). When the Reformation was followed by the Enlightenment, however, rhetoric fell out of favor, and this prejudice continues today, certainly in mainstream psychology. Here, the threat to validity is founded on the researcher’s subjectivity, which is seen to be in need of control. The resulting objectivist methodology has been assumed to provide demonstration pure and simple, not rhetorical demonstration.

There are, of course, two main sets of objectivistic methods that have become conventionalized in most social and health sciences, especially in psychology. Whether experimental or correlation methods are used, emphasis is placed on the importance of separating the researcher as subject and the object under observation, on measurement of the object, and on application of statistics to the measurements. The test of significance then becomes the index of demonstrated truth, or so we are led to believe (Bakan, 1966). Although it has been argued that this mode of demonstration is actually rhetorical (Bazerman, 1988; Billig, 1987; Maki, 1988; Nelson, Megill, & McCloskey, 1987), this argument has taken little effect. Faith in the objectivism underpinning conventional methodology prevails (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

In contrast, in qualitative research typically there is use of small samples, no use of experimental and correlation methods, little if any use of measurement, and no use of statistics. It involves interpretation of human experience and/or action, and its claims are made lingually. It is meant to persuade and so is clearly rhetorical. But is the rhetoric sophistical or demonstrative? The sophists prided themselves in being able to win an argument from any side. Qualitative researchers are not like that. They argue on the side of their understandings, and when their arguments are grounded in experience and/or action, their arguments take effect.

How and why this rhetoric works has to do with the idea of human science, which can be traced to Aristotle’s *synesis* or understanding, a variant of *phroneis* or ethical wisdom and distinguished from *episteme*, or science/knowledge (Bernstein, 1983). Perhaps the first modern contributor to the idea was Hobbes (1651/1968). Following his attempt to apply to civics Galileo’s approach to mechanics, Hobbes concluded that civics is both more and less complex than mechanics. It is more complex because its laws of motion must of necessity take into account human will. It is less complex because we know best what we create, and although we did not create the natural world, we have made the commonwealth.

The line of thinking set in motion by Hobbes has been expressed comparatively recently by sociologist Anthony Giddens (1976) when writing of the double hermeneutic. He has observed that, unlike natural science, which involves a subject-object relationship and hence a single hermeneutic (because natural science, too, is interpretive), sociology involves a subject–subject relationship and thus a double hermeneutic. Giddens has pointed out that its involvement in the latter relationship makes for sociology a pre-interpreted world in which the meanings developed by active subjects enter in fact to the actual constitution or production of that world. He has maintained that the resulting double hermeneutic has no parallel elsewhere, concluding that the logical status of generalizations is in a very significant way distinct from that of natural scientific laws.

Sociology is thus reflexively bound up in its subject matter. The same of course applies to related disciplines such as psychology except, perhaps, neuropsychology (for application of the idea of human science to psychology, see, e.g., Fischer, 1977; Giorgi, 1970; Rennie, 1995a). The double hermeneutic helps to explain why someone may be able to interpret others’ experience and/or

\(^4\) Making an inference to the best explanation is also known as abduction (Sklar, 1999).
action better than they can themselves: The interpreter can be clarifying because she or he comes from the same culture as the others. It also helps to explain why, when others find such an articulation illuminating, they are moved by it (Gendlin, 1997; Taylor, 1971). Moreover, once persons take on an understanding, they may generalize it regardless of the interpreter’s intention. Although not traced to their hermeneutic source as I am doing here, these dynamics have been addressed in observations that returns from qualitative research are picked up and used when they ring true, or resonate within the person (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Stiles, 1993).

The same dynamics can be seen to apply to practitioners such as counselors and psychotherapists who are inclined to draw on intuitive theories and case studies more than on results from conventional, objective/externalizing research (Morrow-Bradley & Elliott, 1986).

In terms of Aristotle’s two modes of demonstrative rhetoric, qualitative researchers typically use examples rather than the enthymeme. As seen, this work involves noticing something in a text; educating the meaning of what has caught attention; conceptualizing it whether as a category, theme, or structure, and so forth; treating the conceptualization as a modified abduction; and testing the abduction through the theorematic deduction and ensuing induction that the abduction in turn modifies. The latter moment of the cycle involves the utilization of examples bearing in one way or other on the conceptualization. As result of the cycling, the researcher’s understanding is grounded in evidence. Moreover, in virtue of the double hermeneutic, the grounding increases the likelihood that the understanding will resonate and be persuasive.

There is one more element of the methodology: The demonstrative rhetoric is also enhanced by researchers’ reflexive disclosure of the perspective they bring to their interpretations.

**Proposition 4: The Demonstrative Rhetoric of Qualitative Research Is Enhanced by Disclosed Reflexivity**

It is helpful when qualitative researchers do what they can to disclose (within reasonable limits) their perspective on the topic they address. This is so because human science is a subject–subject science involving the double hermeneutic, and because qualitative research methods express this human science. It is impossible for a researcher to be completely objective, like a God or titan observing objects from a position of pure detachment (Putnam, 1990), and so it helps the reader to objectify the researcher if the latter discloses the perspective he or she brought to the topic of the research. The disclosure helps the reader to understand the researcher’s understanding.

Granted, there is a need to be discriminating. McLeod and Balamoutsou (2006) have observed that it is difficult within the space allowable in most publication venues to disclose the full range of the perspective brought to a study. Nevertheless, I suggest that this constraint does not prevent revelation of what is highly relevant. Hence, if, say, a study is conducted on the experience of becoming a mother for the first time and how it is managed, it helps the reader to position the author when she indicates whether she is an insider or an outsider. Moreover, when making the disclosure the author wins either way: If an insider, she is given authority; if an outsider, she is respected for her honesty.

This final proposition goes against the grain of the subject-object dualism prized in conventional research methodology. But it is an important part of the methodical hermeneutic methodology. It increases rather than decreases persuasiveness.

**General Applicability of the Methodology**

Hermeneutics is rather like an elephant in the room that even qualitative researchers resist seeing, especially in methodical terms. And when it is seen by them in this way, typically it is only glimpsed and integrated into some other method (e.g., Addison, 1989; Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). Meanwhile, advocates of the relevance of hermeneutics for psychology (e.g., Martin & Sugarman, 2001; Messer, Sass, & Woolfolk, 1988; Polkinghorne, 2000; F. C. Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999; Sandage et al., 2008) have not carried it into methodology, although a partial exception is Martin Packer. In his initial work (Packer, 1985; Packer & Addison, 1989a, 1989b), Packer attempted to fashion a hermeneutic method out of Heidegger’s (1927/1996) hermeneutic phenomenology, to do with ontology or the nature of being. Recently, Packer (2011) has also drawn on writings by Merleau-Ponty, Habermas, and Foucault (among others) when deepening his argument that how people are constituted is best explained hermeneutically in terms of their embodied engagement with the world. This perspective has taken him to action and so has inclined him toward the discursive kind of qualitative research; however, he has yet to work out the details of method as he has observed (Packer, 2011).

In the present day, in virtue of the influential impact of Gadamer’s (1960/1992) philosophical hermeneutics, the term hermeneutics is often thought to be about interpretations embedded in culture and history that imposes a limitation on its application. Insufficiently taken into account is the generalization of the meaning of the term text, given above. Although this generalization does not exclude the application of culture and history to hermeneutics, it does not require it either.

To establish the claim that we indeed have here an all-encompassing methodology of qualitative research will require detailed analyses of the procedures constituting each of its many methods. Up to now, the initial formulation of the methodology has been applied to the grounded theory method (Rennie, 1998, 2000; Rennie & Fergus, 2006), theory-building case-study research (cf. Rennie, 2009; Stiles, 2009), an application of the psychoanalytic case-study (Frommer & Langenbach, 2006), and task analysis (Greenberg, 2007). It is of course not possible to provide this detail in the present article, but, as an installment, in this section I sketch what seems to me to be the applicability of the methodology to the most challenging member of the experiential kind of qualitative research, namely the descriptive phenomenological psychological method. It is challenging because the method’s originator, Amedeo Giorgi, has maintained that the result of its application is description, not an interpreted understanding. I

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5 Coming from a postmodern position, Cunliffe (2011) has argued that the single versus double hermeneutic and corresponding natural science-human science duality are out of date, and that any quest for a unifying qualitative research methodology is misplaced. Instead, methodical pluralism should be embraced because qualitative research is a craft, not the practice of science. I disagree.
follow this sketch with a look at conversation analysis as an example of the discursive kind of methods. This kind is also challenging because its users are inclined to promote methodological diversity, not unity (see Madill & Gough, 2008; on a related note, cf. Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999, 2000; Reicher, 2000). After that, I end with thematic analysis as an example of the experiential/discursive kind of method.

The Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method

Although at times Giorgi has granted that interpretation is involved in his method of descriptive phenomenological psychological research, he has maintained that the result is description nevertheless (Giorgi, 1992). Although not carved in stone, the procedures constituting the method are basically the following (Giorgi, 1975, 1985, 2009). (a) Participants are asked to describe a given experience, such as learning something new; the result is a text whether a written description or an oral description that is transcribed. (b) The researcher reads the entire description to get an overall sense of it. (c) The researcher repeats the reading, this time extracting passages that specifically address the experience of an overall sense of it. (f) For each participant, the transformed meaning units are synthesized into a description of the structure of the participant’s experience. (g) When achieving this structure, the researcher supplements the empirical evidence of the phenomenon with imaginative variation of facets of it to determine the invariant meanings making up the structure. (h) When descriptions are provided by more than one person, the individual structures are synthesized into a general structure. Finally, (i) throughout the development of a structure, it is checked repeatedly against the text and refined until it stabilizes.

Giorgi has drawn on Husserl’s phenomenological philosophy (e.g., Husserl, 1913/1931), as rendered especially by Merleau-Ponty (1962). Husserl held that pure, foundational description of a phenomenon (which he defined as what is present to consciousness) is possible when presuppositions about it are bracketed (put aside) and when empirical evidence of it is supplemented by imaginative variation of all facets of it, to determine its essence.

These claims have been contested. It has been argued that pure description is impossible because description always involves interpretation (Heidegger, 1927/1996; Kockelkans, 1967; Ricoeur, 1981; Warnke, 1987). It has also been maintained by Merleau-Ponty (1962) that imaginative variation cannot encompass the myriad of aspects of any given phenomenon and hence collapses into induction.

Thus, his laudable and in many ways pioneering attempt to develop a qualitative research method suitable for psychology notwithstanding, when adapting Husserl’s philosophical phenomenology to develop a phenomenological method suitable for psychology, Giorgi has been standing on shaky ground when holding out for description. After all, changing the original text into pithier language are patently interpretive moves (for related arguments, see Klein & Westcott, 1994; Osborne, 1994). As for imaginative variation, Giorgi (2009) has agreed with Merleau-Ponty when recommending that, when nomothetic as opposed idiographic claims are to be made, at least three participants should be studied because to rely exclusively on imaginative variation imposes too great a burden on the researcher.

Taking all this into account, it would seem that Proposition 1 above (“methodical hermeneutics”) can be seen in the method, and that Proposition 2 ("logical operations") is evident in the use of the text to validate a conceptualized structure. Regarding the fourth proposition, on disclosed reflexivity, Giorgi (1970) has recommended that users of his method be open about their subjective involvement in their studies. This leaves Proposition 3 (demonstrative rhetoric); Giorgi has not specifically ascribed rhetoric to the method, but his view that all ways of doing human science are matters of approach (Giorgi, 1970) is consistent with it.

Conversation Analysis

In terms of the discursive kind of qualitative research methods, under the rubric of what he calls “discourse studies,” Sanders (2005) has listed these methods in alphabetical order as “applied linguistics and sociolinguistics, argumentation studies, conversation analysis, discourse analysis, discursive psychology, ethnography of communication, language pragmatics, rhetorical communication and semiotics” (p. 57). As mentioned, the users of these methods notice keenly how conversationists interact with each other, and how they along with writers and public speakers vary their discourse depending on context. Such interaction and variability is seen to be organized, however. Hence, Drew (1995) has described conversation analysis as an inductive undertaking directed to sequential organization of patterns structuring verbal conduct in action, which is demonstrated through collections of cases wherein properties of the patterns are discerned. Similarly, Ten Have (1999) has observed that a number of writers including Silverman (1985) and Heritage (1995) have adopted analytic induction (Znaniecki, 1934) to describe conversation analysts’ general approach to data. Ten Have has also suggested that, apart from induction, there may be currency in Ragin’s (1994) endorsement of retrodaction; as indicated above, Peirce used retrodaction as a synonym of abduction.

The ascription of induction to conversation analysis and the consideration of a role for abduction in it as well would appear to bring the method into the region of Proposition 2 (“logical operations”). Meanwhile, if we assume that what conversation analysts study is text, and that their descriptions of patterns of it involve interpretation, then Proposition 1 (“methodical hermeneutics”) can be made to apply as well. The third proposition (“demonstrative rhetoric”) is highly compatible with conversation analysis. Indeed,
rhetoric is often brought into the picture explicitly and sometimes forcefully (e.g., Billig, 1987; Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984).

This leaves the fourth proposition (disclosed reflexivity). Here, I must say, there appears to be less applicability. The postmodern position taken up by most conversation analysts goes with an upward reduction of the self into language and culture. As Wiley (1994, p. 28) has observed, this reduced self is “lacking any sui generis reality and therefore any rights.” This relativism applied to the self may help to explain why conversation analysts typically disclose little about themselves. Accordingly, the fourth proposition is more a prescription of what conversation analysts might consider doing than a description of what they are inclined to do.

Thematic Analysis

The method of thematic analysis has been characterized by Braun and Clarke (2006) as entailing six phases: (a) Familiarization with the data by reading and re-reading them, noting down initial ideas. (b) Attending to interesting features of the data that are coded in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, and collating the data pertinent to each code. (c) Searching for themes, wherein codes are collated into potential themes and data are gathered relevant to each theme. (d) Reviewing the themes, involving checking to see if they work in terms of the codes given to parts of the data as well as the entire set of data, leading to generation of a thematic map of the analysis. (e) Defining and naming themes, accompanied by ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story that the analysis tells; and so generate clear definitions and names for each theme. And (f), Producing the report, which provides final opportunity for analysis involving the selection and analysis of compelling extracts from the data; then final analysis of the extracts, which relates them back to the research question and literature.

The language used by Braun and Clarke (2006) differs somewhat from mine, especially when they talk of data instead of evidence and of searching for themes instead of my educing meanings and articulating them into concepts in the form of, in this case, themes. On the other hand, there is much in their depiction of thematic analysis that seems compatible with the methodical hermeneutic methodology. They see thematic analysis to be interpretive. The hermeneutic circle method and the mix of creativity and logical operations that I ascribe to its application are apparent in their six phases. Elsewhere in their article they write about the extracts, which relates them back to the research question and literature.

Braun and Clarke (2006) has observed, this reduced self is “lacking any sui generis reality and therefore any rights.” This relativism applied to the self may help to explain why conversation analysts typically disclose little about themselves. Accordingly, the fourth proposition is more a prescription of what conversation analysts might consider doing than a description of what they are inclined to do.

**Conclusion**

Shortly after the turn of the 20th century, psychology responded to threats to its credibility by making itself into a behavioral science supported by positivism (Danziger, 1979). Now, a century later, disappointment in what the resulting objectivist methodology has delivered has led some psychologists to turn to qualitative research in search of a better way. In choosing this path, they have used extant methods and have developed new ones. When these methods depart dramatically from conventional research method-ology, in exchange for emancipation from it there is a danger of qualitative research becoming a ghetto in the world of knowledge production. Alternatively, if the methods conform too much to conventional methodology, there is risk of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. As observed by Kvale (1999), qualitative researchers are like Odysseus sailing the hazardous strait between “a no-method Charybdis and an all-method Scylla” (p. 88). The foregoing methodology is my attempt to navigate safe passage through that strait. Although the cursory application of the methodology to a representative of each of the three kinds of qualitative research looks promising, detailed analyses of the procedures of all its main methods is required to fulfill that promise. In the interim, I invite qualitative researchers to apply the methodology to what they do to see how well it fits. Should they and quantitative researchers alike want merit to the methodology, psychology’s mainstream gatekeepers might be more accommodating of qualitative research.

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