Naked Truths: Towards a Reflexive Methodology in Leisure Research

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In this article, I critically reexamine what it means to be a qualitative leisure researcher. Specifically, I discuss three areas in which I believe the influence of positivism has distanced and detached us, thereby threatening the quality of our work. I address our failure to recognize and account for the role that our human "selves" play throughout the research process and how those selves subsequently shape our products; our failure to recognize and account for the role our emotions and personal experiences play in our research endeavors; and our specific data-collection and writing styles, which tend to adhere more to positivist ideals regarding how research should be conducted and reported. I argue that those things that are thought to be problematic in science need not be, and I propose that we adopt a reflexive methodology in leisure studies, a qualitative methodology more in keeping with the theoretical orientations with which we profess to be working.

Keywords emotions in research, interpretivism, qualitative research, reflexive methodology, "self" in research

Over the past several years, leisure researchers, increasingly dissatisfied with the logical positivist approach that currently dominates the field in North America, have argued for alternative approaches to social inquiry. Hemingway (1990, 1995), for example, has argued for a more hermeneutically based depth interpretation in leisure studies, and Kelly (1994) has called for a consideration of critical social constructionism in leisure research.

At the same time, qualitative research methods have been gaining in both popularity and legitimacy in our discipline. Since the early 1980s, leisure researchers have been describing the utility of phenomenological and naturalistic approaches to studying leisure, particularly for understanding the meaning and experience of leisure in various contexts (e.g., Bullock, 1983; Glancey, 1986, 1993; Harper, 1981; Howe, 1985, 1988, 1991; Hultsman & Anderson, 1991; Lee, 1990; Scott & Godbey, 1990). An important contribution towards legitimizing the use of qualitative methods in leisure research appeared in 1991 with the publication of Karla Henderson’s Dimensions of Choice: A Qualitative Approach to Recreation, Parks, and Leisure Research. More recently, Pedlar (1995) argued for the use of participative approaches to inquiry in leisure studies, describing the role that action research could play in helping to foster change and rejuvenate communities.

Over the past 6 years, we also have seen a steady increase in the number of studies using qualitative methods published in our leisure journals (Weissinger, Henderson, & Bowling, 1997). In fact, Stebbins (1997) recently noted that what he calls qualitative-exploratory
research “does exist in leisure studies, and considering the recency of the citations, that this research may be increasing relative to that following the quantitative-confirmatory approach” (p. 427). Findings reported by Weissinger and her colleagues further support the growing presence of qualitative research methods in our discipline. In a study exploring leisure researchers’ knowledge, attitudes, and practices concerning qualitative research, these authors found that the majority of their sample (67.8%) had conducted qualitative research and that a large number of studies employing qualitative methods had been done. They also found that the majority of leisure researchers felt that qualitative research provides valid data and is important for raising new questions and issues related to understanding the concept of leisure.

Despite these important epistemological and methodological transformations in the leisure field, I have found myself becoming more and more uncomfortable with the way that we as leisure researchers do and, more importantly, report qualitative studies. Even though qualitative leisure researchers often acknowledge being informed by interpretivism/constructivism or a critical approach, when one reads our qualitative work it continues to have a distinct quasipositivist feel to it. Over the past couple of years, important questions began gnawing away at me regarding what it means to be a qualitative leisure researcher. I began to take a more critical examination of how we as leisure researchers think about and conduct qualitative research. From this examination, I have come to believe that qualitative leisure researchers, myself included, have bought into a culture dominated by an ideology of science and, in doing so, have compromised both ourselves and more importantly our work.

Using my own personal journey as a qualitative leisure researcher and epiphanies experienced along my travels, I reexamine in this article what it means to be a qualitative leisure researcher. Specifically, I discuss three areas in which I believe the influence of positivism has distanced and detached us, thereby threatening the quality of our work. The three areas addressed in this paper include our failure to recognize and account for the role that our human “selves” play throughout the research process and how those selves subsequently shape our products; our failure to recognize and account for the role our emotions and personal experiences play in our research endeavors; and our specific data-collection and writing styles, which tend to adhere more to positivist ideals regarding how scientific inquiry should be conducted and reported. I argue that those things that are thought to be problematic in science need not be, and I propose that we adopt an alternative approach to qualitative research in leisure studies—a reflexive methodology—that is more in keeping with the theoretical orientations with which we profess to be working.

Before I continue, a definitional note on qualitative research is in order. As Gilgun (1992) pointed out, defining qualitative research “is not for the faint of heart” (p. 22). Part of the problem with defining qualitative research is that there are many types of qualitative approaches, including grounded theory methodology, phenomenology, ethnography, biographical method, autoethnography, heuristic research, and the various approaches to participative inquiry such as action research. Within these various approaches, there are also a variety of alternative qualitative data-collection strategies at our disposal, and these variations often extend within one data-collection technique (e.g., the various different types of interviews such as semistructured in-depth interviews, the long interview, the life-story interview, the active interview, and the focus-group interview, as well as the alternative approaches to observational techniques and visual methods). Defining qualitative research becomes even more problematic if we confuse qualitative data with qualitative research. For the purposes of this article, I draw on Denzin and Lincoln’s generic definition of qualitative research (1994b). According to these authors:
Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case studies, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’s lives. (p. 2)

Thus, for me, open-ended questions on a survey questionnaire that may elicit qualitative data does not constitute qualitative research. From Guba’s description of constructionism (1990), I would add to this definition that qualitative research involves an approach to inquiry in which “inquirer and inquired into are fused into a single (monistic) entity” (p. 27). That is, I also would suggest that qualitative research is a mutual journey taken by both the researcher and the researched. Throughout that journey both the researcher and the participants (or coresearchers) influence and are changed by the research process and together coconstruct meaning through their interactions (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

Further, I believe as Shaw (1997) stated that a pluralism of epistemological and methodological approaches is needed in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the various aspects of leisure in people’s lives. Hence, my position in this article is not that qualitative research is better than quantitative approaches nor that we all should be adopting an interpretivist paradigm to guide our work. I argue, however, that qualitative leisure researchers working within an interpretivist paradigm should stop adhering to positivistic notions of science and adopt a way of social inquiry that is more in keeping with the ontological and epistemological worldviews that guide their work.

The Human “Self” in Qualitative Research

The pot carries its maker’s thoughts, feelings, and spirit. To overlook this fact is to miss a crucial truth, whether in clay, story, or science. (Krieger, 1991, p. 89)

At the forefront of an ideology of science is its emphasis on “scientific objectivity.” In order to do “good” science, researchers should remain detached and dispassionate. They must separate subject from object. We learn to use various devices “such as anonymity, impersonality, detachment, impartiality, and objectivity itself [to give] the impression that scientific knowledge is something ‘out there’, over and above us, able to control and dominate us, and unamenable to our control” (Webb, 1992, p. 749). Things like our selves, our personal experiences, and our emotions contaminate research and therefore should be removed (Kleinman & Copp, 1993). Directed by these scientific notions, we go to great lengths to distance our selves and our personal experiences from every aspect of our work. Consequently, written and oral presentations of our work become what Friedrichs (1981) called “products of a disembodied intellect” (p. 217) or what Geertz (1988) referred to as “author-evacuated” texts (p. 141).

In this scientistic culture, we are taught to be like everyone else, that creativity and individuality does not belong in science. This idea—this removal of the researcher’s self in science—is something to which I found it incredibly difficult to adjust in graduate school and that first alerted me to the problems of being a researcher, at least the way we are socialized to be researchers. I had done my undergraduate degree in music with a minor in theater arts, and until I went back to graduate school I continued to take summer
theater courses over a period of 6 years. Throughout my undergraduate education and particularly in my summer theater courses, I was taught and encouraged to foster my individuality and my unique personal experiences, essentially to use my self, to understand and interpret the music I played and the scripts I read and directed. I was always so fascinated and excited when taking a directing course with several other aspiring directors in which we would all read and direct the same scenes from the same plays, and yet the finished projects would always look and feel so very different. Did that confuse me or bother me? Not at all. We were, after all, very different people viewing those scenes through very different lenses, which had been colored by our own belief systems and by our unique and varied personal experiences, what Schutz (1932/1967) referred to as “stocks of knowledge.” As Bacon stated, “We all look out at the world from our own special cave (emphasis added)” (cited in Friedrichs, 1981, p. 218). Our interpretations and our creations would have to be a reflection of how we saw the world from within those individual and unique situations, those special caves. So, how could I expect that the scenes we produced at theater school would be the same?

When I graduated school, it did not take me long to realize that my individuality and creativity, my human self, was now problematic in science. As directors of research, we were now expected to come up with essentially the same scenes and thus were taught the necessary devices to do so. As Fraser (1993) suggested, “The thought of revealing the self [throughout the] research process becomes a troubling proposition for objective social scientists: it goes against formal ‘scientific’ training.” This seemed so foreign to me. Can the self be removed from the work that we do? Does involving the self actually impede or contaminate our research?

Later when I went out to conduct my own research, I found it tremendously difficult to remove myself. Who I was as a person and my own life experiences influenced what I chose to study. I had worked in a long-term care facility for 6 years after obtaining my undergraduate degree. My work in the field using music with persons with dementia intrigued me so much that I decided to go back to graduate school so that I could investigate further the effects of music programs on persons with Alzheimer’s disease. As Peshkin (1988) noted, the choice of our research topics is rarely random but instead is very much influenced by our human selves. He argued that researchers, particularly fieldworkers, bring two selves to the research endeavor— “the human self that we generally are in everyday situations, and the research self that we fashion for our particular research situation” (p. 270). My human self, particularly my self as former practitioner, had very much guided what specific area I would focus on in my research.

Yet my human self not only played a role in what I chose to study, it also played a role in which questions I would ask, how I would design the research, and how I interpreted my data. For example, as part of my master’s thesis research, I wanted to interview older adults living in long-term care settings about their experiences living with Alzheimer’s disease. It seemed to me that the voices of persons with dementia were blatantly missing from our existing understanding of what it was like to live with an illness causing dementia. Some gerontologists with whom I had contact thought the idea of interviewing persons with dementia was ludicrous. According to them, it was impossible to obtain valid data from “the demented” (their term). Nonetheless, I had worked very closely with persons with dementia throughout my time in the field and I had no doubt that I could obtain credible, rich data from these people that would reflect their perspectives and their experiences. Who I was as a person and my own experiences with persons with dementia, my “deep familiarity” with the subject area (Loftland, 1996, p. 44), shaped how I insisted on conducting my research. As I was finishing up my thesis, manuscripts began appearing that called for the need to understand the experience of dementia from the perspective of those living with it (e.g.,
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Cotrell & Lein, 1993; Cotrell & Schutz, 1993). These researchers argued, as I had when drawing on my personal experiences and stocks of knowledge, that individuals in mild or moderate stages of Alzheimer’s disease were capable of expressing their feelings, thoughts, and concerns about their circumstances.

Struggling with this dilemma—the removal of the researcher’s self from research—I looked outside of the leisure field and discovered that researchers from a variety of other disciplines had been addressing this very issue. Discussions in the feminist literature (e.g., Fanow & Cook, 1991; Harding, 1987; Roberts, 1981; Stanley & Wise, 1983), the anthropological literature (e.g., Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Geertz, 1973, 1988; Stoller, 1989; Van Maanen, 1988), and qualitative educational research (e.g., Lather, 1991; Peshkin, 1988) all had begun to include considerations of how an ideology of science and a focus on objectivity forces the depersonalization and suppression of the researcher’s self and voice (Fraser, 1993). Alternative theoretical orientations such as critical and constructionist approaches to science, those paradigms within which many qualitative leisure researchers situate themselves, in fact “emphasised the importance of the researcher’s self as an acting, feeling, thinking, and influencing force in the collection and interpretation of data” (Daly, 1995, p. 1). Symbolic interactionists, for instance, place great emphasis on the role that the self plays in defining situations and the meanings that things have for us. Blumer (1969) argued that “[a researcher] will bring into play the beliefs and images that he [sic] already has, to fashion a more or less intelligible view of the area of life. In this respect, he [sic] is like all human beings. Whether we be laymen [sic] or scholars, we necessarily view any unfamiliar area of group life through images we already possess” (p. 36). Yet in our own research endeavors, it would seem that the self is only important to consider if it comes from our participants.

What I found in my search was that there was a group of researchers in other disciplines who believe that our selves cannot be removed from what we do, they can only be omitted (Daly, 1992b, 1997; Krieger, 1991). Stanley and Wise (1983) emphasized this point:

We see the presence of the researcher’s self as central in all research. One’s self can’t be left behind, it can only be omitted from discussion and written accounts of the research process. But it is an omission, a failure to discuss something which has been present in the research itself. The researcher may be unwilling to admit this or unable to see its importance, but it nevertheless remains so. (p. 262)

This group of researchers also argued that in-depth, rich understandings of experience do not come from separating or distancing our selves from what we do. They come from immersing and surrendering our selves (Wolff, 1964), and using our selves and our warehouses of knowledge and insight developed through past experiences as data to help understand what it is we are studying. Our uniqueness and idiosyncrasies are in fact “at the heart not the periphery of the scientific enterprise” (Johnson, 1975, quoted in Bell & Newby, 1977, p. 9). Thus, Krieger (1991) warned against “surface conformity” in research and stressed that a suppression of the self and individual perspectives works to stifle ideas and operates against the generation of a more “real” sense of lived experience. She explained: “The great danger of doing injustice to the reality of the ‘other’ does not come about through use of the self but through lack of use of a full enough sense of self, which concomitantly, produces a stifled, artificial, limited, and unreal knowledge of others” (p. 182). Several researchers have illustrated how a more direct use of the self can assist in illuminating the phenomena under study. Daly (1992b), for example, described how the deliberate use of his self and his personal experiences with infertility and adoption throughout his research project assisted him in unraveling the experience of infertility for others, his participants.
For leisure researchers, a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of what leisure means to different people and how leisure is experienced in different contexts can only be enriched by a fuller use of the self in leisure research, not by the omission of the self.

What continues to worry me more, however, is how this sense that we could distance ourselves from our work leads to the false perception that we are telling other’s stories. Somehow we believe that when we write our texts devoid of any sense of our selves and using the words of our participants, the stories we are telling are solely our participants’ stories. Related to this, Daly (1995, 1997) talked about how the traditional emphasis in qualitative research has been the idea that our findings and our theories “emerge from the data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) much like mist rises from a meadow. The assumption is that knowledge is something that researchers “find” or “discover” (Eisner, 1985; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1997; Richards & Richards, 1991; Webb, 1992). Daly (1995, 1997) challenged this assumption arguing that theory does not emerge from the data—it emerges from the researchers; that is, it is drawn out of the data by those who collect it. Knowledge is cultivated and constructed, not found (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Webb, 1992). Daly further argued that our stories and reports, our theories, can, therefore, only ever be “second order stories.” They are always our interpretations about our participants’ interpretations (Geertz, 1973). Both the human self and the researcher’s self are implicated in the decisions of whose accounts and quotes, whose voices, will be privileged in the report (Hertz, 1996), which issues are more important to portray than others, and how those issues or “themes” will come together in the construction of our grounded theories.

I now think about the development of my grounded theories much as I think about the act of composing music. Together with my participants, we decide what instruments and what notes will be used. But I, however, have the ultimate responsibility to come up with the “leitmotifs,” the melodies, and the structure of the final composition, be it a sonata, a concerto, or a grand symphony. Krieger (1991) stressed that qualitative social scientists need to recognize their involvement in depicting other’s lived experiences. She stated: “I think it is important to try to grasp experiences that are not one’s own. However, such attempts ought not to be masqueraded as other than what they are: they are attempts, they grasp only small pieces of experience, and they are always impositions of an authorial perspective” (p. 54).

Meaningful, useful, and rigorous qualitative research, therefore, means addressing the two sets of criteria used to assess qualitative research: trustworthiness and authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Manning, 1997). Demonstrating credible, honest, and authentic research, however, does not mean removing the self from scientific inquiry but demands a complete use of both the research self and the human self throughout the research process, and particularly in our writing. Lincoln (1995) further suggested that the criteria for evaluating qualitative research continue to emerge and develop as our understanding of what it means to do interpretivist social science continues to expand. Two emerging criteria, “positionality or stand point judgements” (Lincoln, 1995) and “meaning in context” (Leininger, 1994), require that researchers explicitly state their interests, values, and positions and discuss how their human selves may have influenced various aspects of the research, particularly the development of their theories. As Richardson (1990) argued:

A progressive postmodernist rewriting . . . proposes that, because all knowledge is partial and situated, it does not mean that there is no knowledge or that situated knowledge is bad. There is no view from “nowhere”, the authorless text. There is no view from “everywhere”, except for God. There is only a view from “somewhere”, an embodied, historically, and culturally situated speaker. (p. 27)
Including the self more fully in our research endeavors and discussions about the location of the self in our reports is essential for contextualizing and grounding our understandings (Hertz, 1996; Krieger, 1991) and is critical if we are to present more faithful and less distorted accounts of the lives and experiences of those we study (Harding, 1986, 1987). Certainly, qualitative leisure researchers do tacitly acknowledge, often in their discussions of their methods, the worldview that has informed their research. They also are starting to write using the first person. What is still missing in the writing, however, is a more complete sense of the human self behind the researcher conducting the research and the role the human self plays at various stages of the research process.

The Role of Emotions in Qualitative Research

A tear is an intellectual thing. (W. Blake, quoted in Bateson, 1972)

The ideology of science also emphasizes rational, intellectual thought over affective processes such as emotions and sentimentality. In fact, emotion often is assumed to be antithetical to reason or rationality and is consequently viewed as a barrier to rational understanding and intelligent action (Lutz, 1986). Oakley (1981) quoting A. R. Hochschild, explained this notion in this way:

While everyone has feelings, “our society defines being cognitive, intellectual or rational dimensions of experience as superior to being emotional or sentimental... Through the prism of our technological and rationalistic culture, we are led to perceive and feel emotions as some irrelevancy or impediment to getting things done”. (p. 40)

Thus, discussions on the role of emotions in research are considered taboo. Indeed, the qualitative-methods bible for many qualitative researchers, Denzin and Lincoln’s (1994a) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, includes only one entry on emotions in its 25-page subject index, and no full discussion on this topic in the text. Further, as Ellis and Flaherty (1992) have suggested, those who discuss their own emotions or experiences throughout the process risk being seen by colleagues as “emotional exhibitionists” and jeopardize how their work will be received (Kleinman, 1991).

This false dichotomy of emotions on one side and rational thought on the other also is linked to gender, with emotion and passion considered feminine and rational thought considered masculine. Keller (1985) described this genderization of science, particularly in relation to the natural sciences:

The most immediate issue for a feminist perspective in the natural sciences is the deeply rooted popular mythology that casts objectivity, reason and mind as male, and subjectivity, feeling and nature as female. In this division of emotional and intellectual labour, women have been the guarantors and protectors of the personal, the emotional, the particular, whereas science—the province par excellence of the impersonal, the rational, and the general—has been the preserve of men. (pp. 6–7)

She further argued that the very language we use to distinguish between the objective and subjective branches of science perpetuate the masculinity of scientific thought. She noted:
When we dub the objective sciences “hard” as opposed to the softer (that is, more subjective) branches of knowledge, we implicitly invoke a sexual metaphor, in which “hard” is of course masculine and “soft” feminine. Quite generally, facts are “hard,” feelings “soft.” “Feminization” has become synonymous with sentimentization. A woman thinking scientifically or objectively is thinking “like a man”; conversely, a man pursuing a nonrational, nonscientific argument is arguing “like a woman.” (p. 77)

I first more directly observed these attitudes regarding science while I was working on my doctoral program. During a graduate seminar, I was discussing how we ignore the role of emotions in research and what the implications of the suppression of our emotions might be to the quality of our work. A male faculty member suggested that because women allow their emotions into the research process and because they tend to be more sensitive to the research participants and their experiences, women make better “researcher-healers” or “savers.” According to him, men are more able to take a value-free, emotionless stance and thus make better “researcher-knowers.” I took this distinction between healers or savers and knowers to mean that as more emotional, subjective, and compassionate beings women were better at helping and protecting others than at rationally understanding them. Women, therefore, at least from his perspective, would perhaps make better social workers than social scientists.

I must admit, however, that as a student I had bought into the belief that we could remain neutral, untouched, unaffected by what we did as researchers. By taking on the role of the researcher, I was protected from whatever might happen during the research process, much like donning a shield in combat. We certainly never talked about the role of emotions in research and the consequences of doing qualitative research on the researcher, and so I gave it very little thought myself. It was not until I went out to conduct my own research that I became very aware of the emotional aspects of what we do as qualitative researchers.

Over a 10-week period, I worked very closely with 16 older adults with Alzheimer’s disease living in a long-term care facility and some of their family members. Those 10 weeks were anything but emotionless. At times I felt enraged and frustrated at the injustices being done to the residents and their family members. I felt terrified, helpless, and the need to escape when one of my participants swung at me several times when I would not let him out of the door he so desperately wanted to go through in his search for home. I frequently felt deep sadness and was often discouraged. How could such vital human beings be so destroyed by this horrible disease? In a moment of horrifying realization, I felt fear and at the same time a depth of sorrow that I had never experienced before. My brother has Down syndrome and likely will get Alzheimer’s disease.

How would my family and I possibly cope with the deterioration—watching the disease gradually take over a son and brother who is deeply treasured and loved? As I gradually got to know the participants better, I laughed with them. When the music programs began to reach the participants, calming or exciting them, I felt complete joy and celebrated with them. And when I finished the project, and to some extent to this day, I felt horrible guilt for leaving. I relived many of those same emotions as I struggled to analyze the data and write the thesis, but in my quest to do good science, I forced myself to push those feelings aside.

When I began working on a paper based on this study a year later, I began to question more seriously why it was so important to report those feelings in my researcher log. Yet it was unscientific to consider those feelings in the analysis or, more importantly, to report them in a serious way in the discussion of my theory. Rereading my log, it occurred to me that my experiences, my feelings throughout the project, gave me much insight into
the social and emotional world of the people I was studying. For example, many of the residents involved in the study often demonstrated or expressed anger and frustration at the loss of control and freedom over their lives. They felt a loss of control over their personal belongings and over many of the decisions regarding what they would do and when they would do them in the course of a day. On days when there were special activities, for instance, the residents rarely were asked if they would like to participate. Instead, they were herded to the activity without ever being consulted about whether or not they would like to attend. Several times during the research project, I experienced these same emotions. On one particular occasion, the administration had made scheduling changes to various programs in the facility. These scheduling changes had direct implications for my music programs, and yet I was not informed about the changes. When I arrived at the facility ready to conduct my music programs, very few of the participants were to be found. After searching for several minutes, I was told by a staff member that most of the residents had been taken to another activity in the auditorium and that they would be there all afternoon. I felt so angry. I felt such frustration over the situation and my inability to do anything about it. I felt a complete loss of control over my programs and my research in the facility. The very emotions I had witnessed in the residents and which the residents had spoken to me about several times, I had experienced firsthand.

Shortly after the episode in the doctoral seminar and still struggling with the question of what to do with emotions in social science, I attended a qualitative-research conference and sat in on a paper presented by a doctoral student. She talked about how her research studying codependency had had a deep emotional impact on her, how it had significantly changed her life, the way she thought about research, and the way she thought about herself. At the end of her presentation, a male audience member got up and announced that doing research was not easy and had consequences and that she should just deal with it and get on with doing science. If she could not hack it perhaps she should find something else to do. My first response was outrage at his questioning of this woman’s ability to do research. Reflecting back on the experience, however, I realised that part of what this man had to say was right. Consequences to us as researchers, especially to qualitative researchers, and emotional responses are an integral part of scientific inquiry. Nonetheless, what he was missing and what now seemed so important to me was that we needed to start acknowledging the emotional aspects of doing qualitative research, which meant openly talking about it with our colleagues. We needed “to create the conditions that make discussions of our feelings and our fears expected and ordinary” (Kleinman, 1991, p. 194). More importantly, however, we needed to stop viewing emotions as only problematic in good science and examine how our emotions actually could be informing us about other’s experiences.

This idea is certainly not new. Many scholars (e.g., Clifford, 1986; Crapanzano, 1970; Hayano, 1979; Johnson, 1975; Krieger, 1985; Reinharz, 1979) have “maintained that understanding the meaning of one’s own experience and empathetically interpreting meaning in the experience of others constitutes bases for inquiry” (Ellis, 1991b, p. 27). As early as 1926, Cooley advocated the use of “sympathetic introspection” in research. In order to understand other’s experiences, we as researchers had to sympathetically ascribe our own emotions and experiences in the situation to those we were studying. In the early 1970s, Briggs (see also Briggs, 1987) found a way to incorporate her own feelings as a tool in trying to understand the emotional life of an aboriginal family living in the Canadian Northwest Territories. In Never in Anger: Portrait of an Eskimo Family, Briggs (1970) talked about how her own feelings of depression, rage, frustration, and humiliation gave her great insight into the emotional life of the people she was studying. She demonstrated that emotions need not be problematic in science, but on the contrary could be an important source of knowledge.
More recently, Ellis (1991a, b) has proposed an emotional sociology that calls for the use of the researcher’s own emotional experience as a legitimate object of research to be described, examined, and theorized. Ellis argued that the dichotomy between impassioned research and detached, emotionless science was false and unnecessary. She and others (Gilbert & Schmid, 1994; Kleinman & Copp, 1993) have described how emotions, as part of the self, influence every aspect of the research process. In fact, Gilbert and Schmid stressed that because of the face-to-face and often long-term involvement with participants and the unpredictability of the qualitative setting, emotions play an even more important role in qualitative research. The very nature of doing qualitative research makes us more vulnerable to intense emotional reactions, particularly for those of us who explore what Sutton and Schurman (1988) refer to as “hot topics.” Gilbert and Schmid concluded: “Emotions have a valid and inescapable place in qualitative research... it would be abnormal for someone to engage in qualitative research and not be emotionally engaged in the process” (p. 6). Further, Daly (1992a) warned that by ignoring our emotional responses and by failing to participate in continuous self-reflection, our own emotional responses and meanings could cloud our understanding of our participants’ experiences. Consequently, unexamined emotional reactions can result in the possible omission of crucial aspects of the story (Kleinman & Copp, 1993). Moreover, Berg and Smith (1988) insisted that the suppression of the emotions and personal experiences of the researcher results in the loss of a wealth of information about the lived experiences and social worlds of the people we are studying. Exploring those specific aspects of the social world that appear to influence the researcher’s feelings and reactions can tell us much about the emotional and social lives of others.

According to Eisner (1991), good qualitative researchers, then, employ “empathy” throughout the research process and use the emotional nature of the experience in their writing to make the experience come alive for their readers. Eisner argued:

Empathy is the ability to don the shoes of another human being... Good writers put you there. Empathy pertains to feeling or to emotion, and emotion, interestingly, is often regarded as the enemy of cognition. I reject such a view. To read about people or places or events that are emotionally powerful and to receive an eviscerated account is to read something of a lie. Why take the heart out of the situations we are trying to help readers understand? (p. 37)

Thus, using empathy allows qualitative researchers to “control in” rather than “control out” our emotions throughout the process in trying to more deeply unravel others’ experiences. At the same time, by including descriptions of the emotional nature of the research, our research and our depictions of the experiences of others become much more real and accessible to our readers. Similarly, Keller (1985) suggested that researchers should abandon what she calls “static objectivity” (i.e., the pursuit of knowledge that begins with the severance of the subject from object rather than aiming at the disentanglement of one from the other and instead adopt the concept of “dynamic objectivity,” a concept comparable to empathy. Keller defined dynamic objectivity as follows:

Dynamic objectivity aims at a form of knowledge that grants to the world around us its independent integrity but does so in a way that remains cognisant of, indeed relies on, our connectivity with that world. In this, dynamic objectivity is not unlike empathy, a form of knowledge of other persons that draws explicitly on the commonality of feelings and experience in order to enrich one’s understanding of another in his or her own right. (p. 117)
Good qualitative research involves a search for knowledge that makes full use of the whole self, cognitive and emotional. Even though any number of emotions can be associated with various leisure experiences, qualitative leisure researchers have yet to explicitly incorporate the emotional aspects encountered throughout the research process in their written reports. Further, if researchers are using their emotions as data in the analysis stage and in the development of their theories, this certainly is not apparent in their descriptions.

Conducting and Reporting Qualitative Research

Roads to knowing are many. (Eisner, 1985, p. 24)

In the attempt to adhere to an objective, detached, scientific way of dealing with and understanding subjective experience, we are taught various strategies that we should employ in our qualitative research projects, strategies that seem more consistent with a positivist orientation (Leininger, 1994). I would like to focus primarily on three issues related to conducting and reporting qualitative research in this section: the assumptions on the relationship between the researcher and the researched, the assumptions on what we should report in our written presentations of our research, and the assumptions on how we should report our work.

First, as young researchers we are taught rules regarding the relationship between the researcher and those we are researching. For example, we are often warned against “going native” (Wax, 1971). We are told that in order to do good science, we must “manufacture distance” (McCracken, 1988) and avoid building relationships with our participants. In her description of participant observation and field research, Henderson (1991), for instance, warned:

Beware, however, of getting too close to the participants and especially to one or two people early on... It is important to become a “regular” but the research should not be invalidated because of biases that may develop in becoming too close. (p. 66)

It is important, therefore, to reduce or eliminate researcher bias rather than to account for it (Dreher, 1994). To control for researcher bias, interviewers and field researchers should know where to draw the line between involvement as participant and involvement as observer (Henderson, 1991). Further, they should never share their opinions or perspectives with participants, should avoid the use of leading questions, and should always refrain from answering questions that could influence the participants’ thinking (Daly, 1995, 1997), and disclosure is to be avoided at all costs. Strategies to use should participants ask for our opinions also are found in many textbooks. Essentially, we are taught to adopt the principle of a hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the researched (Oakley, 1981). In the interview process, the researcher’s job is to ask the questions and the participant’s role is simply to answer them. Then, once we have analyzed the data, we have other researchers not involved in the study examine the data to ensure that the codes and categories we have come up with could be found by others. This is referred to as “coder reliability” (Kvale, 1996). In the name of good and rigorous science, we have people completely outside the context of the research process interpret our data, rather than more directly involving those who are immersed in and living the experience.

Second, we are taught rules regarding what we should report in our written accounts of our research. When we write up our final products, the conventions of research reporting
require that we only report certain aspects of the research process. After all, we must give the impression that our projects progressed in an orderly and neat fashion (Stanley & Wise, 1979). As Kvale (1996) identified: “Editorial requirements promote a distorted picture of scientific research as a logical linear process which is far from the continually changing actual research process with its surprises, design changes, and reformulations of concepts and hypotheses” (p. 83). Rarely do we describe in detail what the research process actually looked like (Henderson, 1991). In studies using interviews, for example, we typically state that we used in-depth interviews and then go on to report how many interviews were conducted (i.e., the sample size), how the questions were asked, how information was recorded, the length of the interviews, and where the interviews took place (Oakley, 1981). What often is missing from our accounts, however, is information concerning how the research design unfolded as the research progressed and what factors influenced the directions the research took. Those who use theoretical sampling procedures, for instance, often identify that they are doing so but rarely describe in detail how that process evolved, specifically how theoretical sampling decisions were made and when, and what factors influenced those decisions. Henderson (1991) also noted that we often neglect to report those strategies or techniques that failed in the research process, information that might help us strengthen our qualitative-research strategies in the future. Further, it is rare to find a description in our reports of the nature and quality of the relationship and interaction between the interviewer and those being interviewed throughout the process.

Our descriptions of our analysis procedures are even more scant. We often report what procedure was used, but our readers are left to guess how that procedure was specifically employed and what questions were asked of the text. For instance, if a constant comparative method (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994) was utilized, what was compared to what? How exactly were the comparisons made? How were negative cases treated? Also, it is often unclear what the involvement of the participants was in the analysis and interpretation of the data (e.g., Were member checks used throughout the analysis process and how were they used? Were participants directly involved in the development of theoretical categories and concepts, and if so, how were they involved?). As Oakley (1981) suggested when referring to the interview process, qualitative research and analysis are “rather like marriage: everybody knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets” (p. 31).

We also seem to have developed a standard way of reporting our findings, one that focuses on the commonalities among participants and ignores the inconsistencies. In working with adult daughters in my dissertation research to try to more deeply understand how they view their roles in long-term care facilities and how their roles impact on their leisure lifestyles, I found many common themes in the stories told to me by the women. What intrigued me more, however and what seemed to drive my search to gain a more comprehensive understanding of institution-based caregiving roles, were the inconsistencies, the negative cases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and the complex nature of their roles. Looking for negative cases and examining them more closely, of course, is central to theoretical sampling and is critical in order to reach “saturation” of theoretical categories and concepts (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Yet rarely are these negative cases, these inconsistencies, incorporated into our writing and into the presentation of our theories. We have become very good at reporting the patterns and themes that are common among participants, at providing snippets of data to support these patterns and themes, and we assume that we have captured in a complete way the essence of others’ experiences. Sandelowski (1994) emphasized, however, that it is no longer acceptable for qualitative researchers to suggest that they have achieved theoretical saturation after interviewing or observing a few people of often vastly different social and cultural circumstances. I would
add that it is no longer acceptable to only present the commonalities among participants; the stories and theories we construct should be particularly mindful of, and directly incorporate, the themes, cases, or issues that do not “fit.”

Finally, to ensure that our readers believe that we have adhered to the notion of objectivity, we are taught rules regarding how to report our work. We learn how to bury our own words, our personal writing styles, and how to express our thoughts and our theories clothed in the accepted language and styles of traditional positivism (Glancy, 1993). We do this by constructing third-person accounts of our research, grammatically separating object from subject (Richardson, 1990). Using this particular style of writing and this form of language gives the impression that the information we are presenting has a neutral, value-free, impartial basis (Webb, 1992). Krieger (1991) discussed the problems with how young researchers are socialized into a culture of detached academic writing:

In Social Science, we do not learn very much about how to build from within. We learn how to conform. We are encouraged to speak in generally acceptable styles rather than to speak in ways that are our own. The ability to speak from within takes nurturance. It requires the use of one’s own words rather than the use of currently fashionable words in one’s own discipline. It also requires actions to protect the inner space in which one’s ideas can take form. (p. 36)

This “acceptable” writing style is so ingrained in academe that recently, when I suggested to my students in an upper-year undergraduate course on leisure in later life that they might want to consider writing their term papers in first person, they became terrified. Each of the students was required to do a life-story interview with an older adult to try and uncover the meaning of leisure for that individual. The interview part of the process was found to be intriguing and exciting for the students, but writing the paper in the first person became an unbearable challenge for many. The students were very confused at first and needed confirmation from me several times to ensure that I actually had requested that the paper be written using the first person, employing their own personal writing styles. After all, other professors had made it quite clear that they were only to use the third person in their writing. When they became convinced that it was “okay” to write using the personal pronoun “I,” getting over the stumbling block of only knowing how to write in third person proved very difficult for most of the students. Writing in first person did indeed need nurturance, patience, and much encouragement before the students would even attempt it.

From my own experiences doing qualitative research and struggling with how best to report the process and how to tell an engaging, accessible narrative, I have come to believe, as Stanley and Wise (1979) suggested, that “our presentations of research become research as it is described and not research as experienced” (p. 360). For example, in informal conversations with researchers and in my own research experiences, it is evident not only that personal relationships do develop during interviews or field work, but that these relationships are necessary in building rapport and are important sources for gaining in depth understandings of the lived experience of others. In addition, rarely have I found qualitative research to be as orderly, neat, and consistent as we suggest it is in our written accounts. On the contrary, I have found the qualitative research process to be a dialectical process filled with chaos and order, predictability and surprise, confusion and great clarity, many commonalities and as many inconsistencies. Yet, in end products, we see no evidence of such personal relationships developing and are left with no sense of the disorder and conflict involved in the process of doing qualitative research, often in an attempt to give the impression of the maintenance of objectivity throughout the research process.
In fact, in my own research endeavors, I have found it impossible to ignore the development of relationships with participants and have come to recognize the importance of these relationships in gaining rich, in-depth understandings. When I was interviewing adult daughters of persons living in long-term care facilities for my dissertation, for instance, the women very often defined our relationship as something that existed beyond the limits of asking and answering questions and as a more collaborative endeavor. From my first telephone contacts with the potential participants, it became very clear to me that these family members had many questions to which they expected me to respond, questions they were struggling with in order to sort out their own definitions of their caregiving roles and the nature of leisure within those roles. I felt uncomfortable expecting them to share so much with me, information that was very personal and often very painful to discuss, and yet not being able to share my thoughts or feelings with them. The participants showed much interest in my own personal situation. Family members, for example, wanted to know how I came to be interested in the area I was studying, what I thought the role of family members was in long-term care facilities, and how I defined the concept of “caregiving,” which was not a term they typically used to describe their activities. Several of the women saw our relationship and their responsibility to the research project as extending beyond the interview stage, and thus I received several subsequent telephone calls from various participants, particularly when the women lost their loved ones. They called not only to inform me of the death of their parents, but also to reflect more about their experience and how the death had changed the nature of their caregiving role and their lives. Two family members insisted on loaning me books they felt would help illuminate how they perceived their experience. Many of the participants expressed much interest in the research findings, showed up at various presentations I gave related to findings from the study, and inquired about how they might get a copy of the final report. Quite recently, almost 3 years after collecting the data for that project, I received a note from one of the women who participated in the study. She was reflecting again on the research process and how she had come to know more about herself throughout that process. She also felt the need to let me know how she was coping now that her parent had died. From my own research experience, I realised that we, my participants and I, were sharing a mutual search for understanding about the institution-based caregiving experience and the nature of leisure within that experience. I further came to understand that in the research process we had developed honest, trusting, and sometimes close relationships and were together immersed in a collaborative, meaning-making process that could not have been unravelled or as deeply understood in any other way (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

Again, my own research experiences did not fit with what I had been socialized to believe. As Holstein and Gubrium (1995) identified, the objective approach with its emphasis on distance fails to recognise the unavoidably collaborative, interactional, mutually interpretive nature of qualitative techniques such as in-depth interviews. They argued, “Both parties in the interview are necessarily and unavoidably ‘active.’ Each is involved in meaning-making work. Respondents are not so much repositories of knowledge—treasures of information awaiting excavation—as they are constructors of knowledge in collaboration with interviewers” (p. 4).

Unsatisfied and uncomfortable with the semistructured in-depth interview approach, I began to search out alternative interview approaches. I wanted an approach that recognized the value of developing relationships with participants. I also wanted an approach that gave credit to participants as active, interpretive humans in their own right. For example, it is assumed that if we “lead” participants or disclose too much information, our participants, even if they disagree with what we say, will not tell us so or will alter their perceptions of their experiences to fit our perceptions. I believed, on the contrary, that a more give-and-take,
back-and-forth approach would actually help participants to sort out their own ideas and perceptions about their own experiences. I found and came to adopt the philosophy of active interviews proposed by Holstein and Gubrium (1995).

Active interviews recognize that the interview is very much shaped by the interviewer and his or her research agenda and, therefore, the topic areas of interest to the researcher as well as the position of the researcher are made explicit to the participants. The active interview is much more conversational in style and capitalizes on the dynamic interplay between the researcher and respondents. In active interviews, the interview guide is just that—a guide. In some interviews, it is followed relatively closely. In other interviews, it may be abandoned totally as respondents develop their own stories based on what is important to them and their lived experience. In projects using theoretical sampling procedures, in fact, interview guides should adapt and grow as the research progresses. Most importantly, active interviews involve mutual disclosure, a sharing of information and insight in the meaning-making process. This approach means sharing background information or personal experiences with respondents. Introducing background information or describing personal experiences can be a very useful way of providing concrete contexts or reference points on which respondents can contemplate and explore their own situations and experiences. Information from prior interviews becomes important background information to be utilized in subsequent interviews. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) stated:

"Whereas the standardized interview would try to limit informational “spillage” from one interview to the other, active interviewing takes advantage of the growing stockpile of background knowledge that the interviewer collects in prior interviews to pose concrete questions and explore facets of respondents’ circumstances that would not otherwise be probed. (p. 46)"

Similarly, Kvale (1996) argued that leading questions do not necessarily reduce the reliability of findings but, on the contrary, actually may enhance reliability. Leading questions allow the researcher to check the reliability of the answers given by the participants as well as to clarify and confirm the researcher’s interpretations. Thus, Kvale (1996) suggested that leading questions be used more in qualitative-research interviews. I have used leading questions effectively to explore potential issues and initial perceptions of meanings and experiences in early interviews as well as to examine the presence of important themes identified in earlier interviews with other participants in later interviews. I also have found leading questions to be very useful to include as part of member checks or as an important tool to clarify my interpretations of the participants’ experiences. Nonetheless, individual researchers have to determine for themselves when it is appropriate to use leading questions.

In the active interview, therefore, the interview process involves the development of relationships and mutual disclosure in which interviewers and participants together explore and attempt to more fully understand areas relevant to the research project. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) further proposed that qualitative researchers need to incorporate this shared meaning-making process into the production and analysis of data and ultimately into their written reports. It is my belief that many qualitative leisure researchers actually incorporate some of the strategies of the active interview in their own work. Nonetheless, any sense of the building of relationships, of the context of the interview, or of the disclosure that was involved is lost in the written accounts of their work. More than 5 years ago, Glancy (1993) identified how our written reports of qualitative leisure research lack any impression of “the interaction between people [the researchers and participants] sharing an experience” (p. 47). A cursory review of published qualitative leisure research articles suggests that little has changed.
Scholars working within an interpretivist paradigm recognize that objectivity is not achieved by using methods that distance them from their participants but is, in fact, reached by getting close to the phenomenon of study and those living the experience (Wolff, 1964). Drawing on Blumer and Denzin, Daly (1997) emphasized:

To try to collect data from a distance is to risk “the worst kind of subjectivism” (Blumer, 1969, p. 86) or the “fallacy of objectivism” (Denzin, 1978, p. 10). From this perspective, the assessment of validity is contingent on how close the researcher can understand the account and its context in terms of who produced it, for whom, and why (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). It is precisely this combination of subjectivity and objectivity that will enhance the authenticity of theoretical accounts. (p. 357)

Dreher (1994) further argued that validity and reliability are as relevant to interpretive research as they are to positivist approaches. According to Dreher, however, “the quality, validity, and reliability of the data are grounded in the skill of the investigator to establish relationships with informants... They are achieved through an extended, trusting, and confidential relationship between investigator and informants rather than through the establishment of the psychometric properties of research instruments” (p. 286). I would add that theoretical saturation depends on the establishment of these relationships and continuing to rely on these relationships to develop thematic categories and to construct more complete understandings of the lived experiences of others.

Interpretivist researchers also are committed to reporting and describing the context within which the data were collected. This means providing more detailed and complete accounts of the research process, presenting research as it is experienced. Demonstrating auditability (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), dimensions of trustworthiness in qualitative research, demands a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of the methods. Our accounts of the methods utilized should describe in detail the strategies used and how the emergent research design unfolded as the study progressed. Scott and Godbey (1990) pleaded that referees of qualitative research “grant a greater degree of trust on the part of the researcher” in their judgments of qualitative work (p. 200). I disagree. It is the responsibility of the researcher to demonstrate trustworthiness and the only way to do this is to precisely and clearly “explicate how we claim to know what we know” (Johnson & Altheide, 1990, p. 29; Kvale, 1996) in the specific context in which our claims were conceived. Reporting research in context thus also means describing the nature of the relationships between the researchers and the participants. According to Berg and Smith (1988):

A description of the research relationship provides the context necessary for interpreting what has been discovered. The more process of separating the data from their context of origin diminishes the meaning of the data. Preserving as much of the context as possible is an investment in maintaining the meaning of the data. (p. 22)

In addition, presenting research as experienced means incorporating the contradictions and inconsistencies in the data into our writing. The reality of the lived experience we are trying to understand is filled with contradictions and inconsistencies, but as Daly (1997) suggested, only reporting the logical consistency of social life creates “sanitised theories” (p. 358). Meaningful qualitative stories and theories attempt to unravel the complexities of life (Daly, 1997) and present “contradictions and ironies rather than mundane descriptions”
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(Kleinman & Copp, 1993, p. 53). Further, in his description of a dialectic perspective, Kvale (1996) argued:

If social reality is in itself contradictory, the task of social science is to investigate the real contradictions of the social situation and posit them against each other. In other words, if social processes are essentially contradictory, then empirical methods based on an exclusion of contradictions will be invalid for uncovering a contradictory social reality. (p. 57)

I have found that one of the best ways of incorporating inconsistencies into my writing is to create profiles of individual participants and present these profiles in my descriptions of lived experience. An important phase in the heuristic research process proposed by Moustakas (1990) is the construction of individual portraits. Moustakas suggested that “individual portraits should be presented in such a way that both the phenomenon investigated and the individual persons emerge in a vital and unified manner” (p. 52). This approach, therefore, allows the researcher to retain and report as much as possible the essence of the individual people he or she is investigating. It allows researchers a way to provide a description of the phenomenon in specific contexts. Most importantly, presenting individual profiles of participants provides a means by which qualitative researchers can highlight differences in experiences as well as commonalities.

Finally, interpretivist researchers take ownership of their work by writing in the first person. Webb (1992) demonstrated how writing in the third person is inconsistent with the epistemological assumptions of both interpretivism and critical theory. Given the social nature of qualitative research and the embeddedness of both the research self and the human self in the research process, reports of qualitative research require the use of an active, first-person writing style. Webb (1992) argued that to write up qualitative research in any other way was a “form of deception in which the thinking of scientists does not appear, [in which the researchers] are obliterated as active agents in the construction of knowledge” (p. 749). Furthermore, writing in the third person “constitutes a form of mystification in which the social elements of the research encounter are hidden from scrutiny, preventing readers from evaluating the adequacy of the research” (p. 750). I must emphasise again, however, that it is not enough to simply incorporate the personal pronoun “I” into our writing. Writing in the first person must go hand-in-hand with descriptions of the role of the self throughout the research process.

Adopting a Reflexive Methodology in Qualitative Leisure Research

I no longer believe that our selves and our emotions and personal experiences can be removed from the research process, nor do I believe that the self, emotions, and more collaborative research styles are necessarily problematic. On the contrary, I now believe that these aspects are central to strong, rigorous qualitative research and good science. Accepting this, I suggest that qualitative leisure researchers deliberately employ both the researcher and the human self and her or his emotions and experiences in the research process by embracing a reflexive research methodology. Myerhoff and Ruby (1982) defined reflexivity and its outcome, reflexive knowledge, as

The capacity of any system of signification to turn back upon itself, to make itself its own object by referring to itself: subject and object fuse . . . Reflexive knowledge, then contains not only messages, but also information as to how it came into being, the process by which it was obtained. (p. 2)
Throughout this article I have suggested some of the strategies that are necessary in incorporating a reflexive methodology. Here I summarize specifically what it means to do reflexive research. First, a reflexive methodology demands the conscious and deliberate inclusion of the full self (i.e., the researcher self and the human self) throughout the research process (Daly, 1992b). This involves continuous, intentional, and systematic self-introspection (Daly, 1992a) beginning before we ever enter the field or begin data collection and continuing throughout the writing of our stories. Krieger (1991) suggested that all researchers conduct a pre–data collection self-assessment and a data collection–stage self-assessment, as well as keeping notes on our responses to our data throughout the research process. A reflexive research methodology means making personal experiences, belief systems, motivations, and tensions as well as political agendas explicit and continually assessing the impact those factors may be having on the work that we are doing (Fraser, 1993).

Second, a reflexive methodology recognizes the researcher’s connectivity with the world around her or him and involves the use of empathy throughout the research process. It embraces the direct incorporation of our own feelings into the analysis, using emotions and experiences documented in personal research journals to support or refute our initial assumptions or perspectives and to help us understand the lived experiences of others (Kleinman & Copp, 1993; Lather, 1986). It means asking ourselves how we felt during different stages of the research and why we felt that way, identifying those aspects of the research that were difficult and those that were easy, and reflecting on the emotional issues raised throughout the research process and what those experiences tell us about the phenomenon under study (Kleinman & Copp, 1993; Krieger, 1991). It also means weaving those emotions and personal experiences into our writing to help make the phenomenon under study come alive for our readers.

Third, a reflexive research methodology recognizes the active, collaborative role that both the participants and researchers play in the meaning-making process and demands a move towards the notions of active interviews described by Holstein and Gubrium (1995) and experiential or participative research. Such research recognizes the importance of developing extended, trusting relationships in qualitative research and explicitly incorporates self-disclosure on the part of the researcher throughout the research process. A reflexive methodology also more directly incorporates the participants in interpretations of the data and in constructions of our grounded theories, what Lather (1986) referred to as “dialogic research designs.” Lather argued that researchers need “to provide an environment that invites participants’ critical reaction to researcher accounts of their worlds” (p. 268).

Finally, adopting a reflexive approach means learning to report our research and to write our stories and theories in different ways. As reflexive researchers we must detail explicitly in our written accounts how the research process developed over time, how research-design decisions were made throughout the process, and what factors affected those decisions. We must outline how the analysis procedures were conducted and what questions were asked of the text during the analysis phase. We also must describe how our human selves and our personal experiences influenced the decisions we made and our interpretations of the data. As Johnson and Altheide (1990) argued: “Unlike the novelist who is not compelled to tell the readers the how of substantive claims, the reflexive social scientist seeks to more completely share the claims-making process with readers” (p. 32). We, as data-gathering instruments, must outline the specific process by which we gathered the data (Myerhoff & Ruby, 1982). Further, reflexive knowledge, stories, and theories highlight not only the commonalities in experience but also focus on the fundamental contradictions and inconsistencies observed and being reported by participants. Moreover, a reflexive research approach means writing in a way that allows us to take ownership of our “second-order stories.” Daly (1995) suggested that we can begin to do this by using the active, first person in written accounts and by
claiming interpretations as our own through the use of phrases such as “I responded to these comments with the idea that . . .” or “what I believe they were saying was.” A reflexive research methodology explicitly incorporates the researcher and her or his experience into the analysis process and into theory-building endeavors, and it demands the conscious and deliberate inclusion of statements and disclosures of our selves and our personal experiences in written accounts of the research (Daly, 1992b).

As qualitative researchers, I suggest we adopt a methodology more in keeping with the interpretivist or constructionist paradigms in which we claim to be working, a methodology that allows us to take ownership of our research and our stories and present, in essence the more faithful “naked truths.” More specifically, I believe that it is time that we as qualitative leisure researchers embrace a methodology that allows each of us to present our work in our own unique voice and one that gives us permission to “sign” our work (Eisner, 1991). In doing so, our work at once not only will become ours but will better reflect the mutual process involved in the construction of meaning portrayed in our stories. Such products can only become more accessible to others who may find utility in our stories and theories we create.

References


