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# COPING WITH THE DUAL CRISES OF LEGITIMATION AND REPRESENTATION IN RESEARCH

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**ABSTRACT** *The dual crises of representation and legitimation pose significant dilemmas for researchers, as they cast doubt over the value of the research process. However, critical examination of these crises can encourage researchers to reflect on questions of philosophical and pragmatic importance, such as: "What does truth mean?" and "What makes for good research?" The crises are therefore worthy of investigation. In this paper I introduce and critically examine the dual crises by asking: "If these crises are 'real', how, as interpretive researchers should we cope with them?"*

## INTRODUCTION

My aim in this paper is to introduce and discuss the dual crises of representation and legitimation, as an understanding of these crises can help to politically inform research approach and process (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In brief, the crisis of representation recognises the limitations of language for representing reality, and thus, it accepts that researchers can never fully capture or textually replicate lived experiences (Denzin, 1997). This recognition leads to some potential research dilemmas. For example, as readers of research how do we know whether research texts are telling the truth? Or as active researchers, how do we know that our interpretations of social events represent the truth? However, at a more fundamental level this crisis encourages us to ask what does *truth* actually mean?

Closely linked to the crisis of representation, is the crisis of legitimation, which acknowledges that the research text is the subjective construction or interpretation of a researcher. Therefore, there is no objective means of judging the quality of research (Denzin, 1997). Consequently, the crisis of legitimation is concerned with how we judge the quality or worth of research. And, if we accept that we do not have an objective tool or method for legitimating research, are we able to differentiate between good or poor research? Should we celebrate that a novel or a dance or a film can represent quality research? In essence, the crisis of legitimation can encourage us to examine what we actually mean by research, to critically reflect on our reasons for undertaking research, and at a deeper level, to become aware of the intimate links between knowledge construction, research legitimation and issues of power.

The dual crises can, therefore, help challenge researchers to reflect on their research paradigm or basic belief systems, or more specifically, questions of importance related to ontology, epistemology and methodology (Bruce & Greendorfer, 1994; Sparkes, 1992). Through examination of how one views social reality (ontology), and issues of knowledge construction (epistemology), one can gain a clearer perspective of how to do social research. These paradigmatic reflections can be of importance for all researchers, as the assumptions generated from exploring these issues, can help lay a foundation for undertaking the research process or the art of interpretation (Denzin, 1994). However, the

downside of the dual crises are that they pose research dilemmas that do not have clear-cut answers. Consequently, I have recently questioned that if these crises are real, then how do I cope with them when attempting to do research? I have even wondered, given the scope of potential impact that these crises proposed, what relevance there was for undertaking research. But I soon regained my passion for, and confidence in, the relevance of research.

In this article I aim to illustrate how I cope with the dual crises when undertaking research. But initially, as my coping strategy stems from a social constructionist stance, I will outline how I view social constructionism and how this impacts on epistemological matters. This will be followed by a discussion that specifically introduces the problems associated with research representation and legitimation, and I conclude by outlining how I cope with these crises.

## **AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM**

The development of social constructionism, as a social theory, has been closely informed by postmodern and poststructural sensibilities, particularly the work of Michel Foucault (e.g. 1973, 1977, 1978). Hence, social constructionism acts to challenge many of the notions that underpin positivist or empirical social science, especially the traditional psychological approach for understanding how people think (Burr, 1995). Social constructionism, therefore, rejects that people have essential characteristics, and its major tenet rests on the assumption that the manner in which people make meaning is constructed socially (Drewery & Winslade, 1997). This perspective emphasises the notion that the individual and society are inextricably joined. Or as Burr (1995) succinctly states, "individuals, the social practices in which they engage, the social structure within which they live and the discourses which frame their thought and experience become aspects of a single phenomenon" (pp. 110-111). In this sense, individuals are not viewed deterministically as products of society, nor conversely, as complete free agents. Social constructionism, therefore, asserts that people do have agency but that this agency is influenced or constrained by social factors, or more specifically, through the interweavings of discourse, knowledge and power.

Discourse, in a Foucauldian sense, is used to signify a relatively consistent set of meanings or a framework of understandings that people use to make sense of and change our world (Drewery & Monk, 1995). Thus, discourse should not be thought of as just a linguistic phenomenon as it structures our way of thinking and (re)constructs social relations; "... it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together" (Foucault, 1978, p. 100). For example, practices around specific discourse in areas of technical knowledge, such as medicine or academia, influence who can speak and with what authority. Discourse, therefore, can be thought of as "the site where meanings are contested and power relations determined" (Rail, 1998, p. xiii); or, as Sawicki (1991) notes, as "ways of knowing" which can be "equated with ways of exercising power over individuals" (p. 22). In this sense, power struggles can be perceived as contestations over meanings (Miller & Penz, 1991).

The more powerful discourses that operate in our society are believed to have developed from the social sciences, such as psychology, sociology, criminology and pedagogy, and to have strong institutional bases, for example, in our asylums, hospitals, prisons and systems of schooling (Weedon, 1987). These institutions not only help produce and perpetuate relations of power, but they also serve as laboratories in which people can be observed and where knowledge can

be constructed about people (Smart, 1985). For example, these institutions produce knowledge about the sane and insane, the sick and the well, and the deviant and the normal (Foucault, 1978).

Social constructionism asserts that knowledge and power relations should not be thought of as fixed, and importantly, that through changing discursive practices social transformation is possible. This recognition highlights that "making meaning is a serious and ethical business in which what each of us does counts, and we have no option but to take notice of one another" (Drewery & Winslade, 1997, p. 36); or as the feminist dictum states, "the personal is political and the political is personal". This political awareness of the links between discourse and power can encourage researchers to construct knowledge with an ethic of caring (Noblit, 1993). This epistemological issue will be discussed in more depth later in this paper.

Burr (1995), in a summary of the key assumptions of social constructionism, states: (1) that knowledge is not based on unbiased and objective observations of the world, thus, we should believe that notions about gender or race or sexuality are social constructs and not natural categories; (2) the manner in which we understand our world is historically and culturally specific, thus, "particular forms of knowledge that abound in any culture are therefore artefacts of it" (p. 4); (3) truth and knowledge occur through social processes; and, (4) knowledge is closely related to social action or power. Social constructionism, therefore, hinges on what Sparkes (1992) labels as a subjectivist epistemology and an external-idealist ontology, that is, the belief that knowledge is of a subjective construction and social reality is viewed as multiple and as existing in people's minds.

Although I recognise the existence of multiple realities, I also accept that most people live a socially interactive life and will share similar lived experiences, such as attending the same school system or participating in the same sport. Therefore, I recognise that many of us *may* negotiate our lives with a set of similar understandings. However, with respect to the postmodern condition and the increased fragmentation, divergence, and rapid rate of social change, I also accept that it becomes "more and more dangerous to assume that there are similarities between our experiences . . . (and) . . . we need to be extremely careful about what we assume about each other, and about our common purposes" (Drewery & Monk, 1995, p. 311). For example, we should not even assume that two members of the same family, who view the same television program, will create the same understandings from their shared experiences, or that they will each develop a consistent set of understandings. Nevertheless, it is clear that individuals are active in the creation of meaning, and far from merely responding to the social world, they actively contribute to its creation (Denzin, 1997). Thus, our convoluted social world can be viewed as a changing social process in which people make sense of their lives in the context of their social history and interactions.

In the next section, I will discuss how this social constructionist view impacts on knowledge construction.

## MATTERS OF EPISTEMOLOGY AND POLITICS

A social constructionist view of reality and knowledge has consequences for research methodology, and therefore, for the manner in which researchers speak, act and write (Gardener, 1991; Richardson, 1992). As Denzin (1997) illustrates:

. . . a theory of the social is also a theory of writing . . . Theory, writing, and ethnography are inseparable practices. Together they create the conditions that locate the social inside the text. Hence, those who write culture also write theory. Also, those who write theory write culture (p. xii).

Richardson (1994) further blurs the distinction between writing and theory by outlining that writing is not just a mode of telling but is in itself a method of inquiry. By writing in different manners we learn more about ourselves and about our topic. Similarly, Freire (1972) recognises the blurring between research and learning, but also between research and social action, and in this sense Freire highlights that writing is distinctly political.

Given the recognition of the inseparable link between researcher, theory and writing, and the close connections between discourse, knowledge and power, I accept that research is a political act that should be concerned with relations of power (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This recognition is an important aspect of my research philosophy as I now assume that research can directly influence the readers' (and indirectly others) understandings of our social world. And these understandings can contribute to contestations over a variety of social meanings, hence all research can be viewed as linked to power struggles. I therefore believe that *all* researchers should be well-versed in the art and politics of interpretation (Denzin, 1994).

Denzin (1994) outlines that the art of interpretation revolves around how researchers make sense of what they have learned through their research experiences (e.g. from their copious field notes, documents, interviews and impressions), or more specifically, how the researcher "artfully" moves from the "field to the text to the reader" (p. 500). Thus, the researcher weaves a story of his/her experiences and in doing so creates an influential context for the reader's interpretations. This art is dependent on ontology and epistemology.

My ontological perspective leads to an acknowledgement that researchers cannot stand apart from the reality they are observing, as it is impossible for them to achieve some "God-like" perspective. Clearly, how one writes reflects the manner in which one subjectively views the world. Consequently, I view knowledge as a subjective construction, and researchers as interpreters through value-laden eyes (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Epistemologically, this represents a subjectivist position, as knowledge can never be "certifiable as ultimately true but rather it is problematic and ever changing" (Sparkes, 1992, p. 26). Likewise, Geertz (1973) recognises the subjectivity of research by outlining, "what we call our data are really our constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to" (p. 9). Researchers, therefore, interpret the stories that other people tell, or as Denzin (1997) states, researchers discover the multiple stories or truths of the lived experiences of others, and then they write their own story of this event.

The truths that researchers construct should be viewed as only partial and localised views of reality (Bruce, 1999; Denzin, 1994; Rail, 1998). This perspective argues against the notion of universal truths and against ethical arguments that involve claims to universal rights and wrongs. However, I do not view this perspective as nihilistic, as I recognise that truth is constructed through "processes of consensus, within particular contexts, in relation to particular purposes" (Drewery & Monk, 1995, p. 304). I therefore argue that solutions to social problems are negotiated in local contexts, and these local actions *can* have reverberations on

a much grander scale; social transformation is possible and research can play an important role! Furthermore, it is important to understand that the local is not simply framed just by geographical size, but that it indicates that individuals make their own meanings within local contexts. Therefore, the local could represent a conversation with a neighbour, or a lecture to a 100 students, or a TV interview that is viewed by a 100,000 people.

This localised perspective of truth promotes a blurring of boundaries between science and art, and fact and fiction, (Lather, 1986; Sparkes, 1992). Furthermore, this blurring leads to knowledge construction dilemmas, or more specifically, the interlinking crises of representation and legitimation (Denzin, 1997). These crises will now be expanded upon.

## THE CRISES OF REPRESENTATION AND LEGITIMATION

The crisis of representation, as informed by poststructural and postmodern sensibilities, revolves primarily around the problematic link between text or language, and experience; or more specifically, the limitations of language and the realisation that one cannot fully capture or textually replicate lived experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Language is not transparent, that is, we should not assume that language provides a direct or pure link between our feelings or experiences, and our ability to communicate these feelings (Burr, 1995). Language, in this sense, becomes problematic as it can be simultaneously viewed as helping create our social reality, and paradoxically, as not entirely adequate for describing our social reality (Polkinghorne, 1988). The research text, therefore, is no longer viewed as an authoritative representation of social reality, as lived experience can be viewed as "created in the social text" by the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 11). Kvale (1996), as an example of the problems of research representation, warns that there is a danger in conceiving interviews as transcripts because interviews are living conversations, whereas, the transcript is a "hybrid between an oral discourse, unfolding over time, face to face, in a lived situation – where what is said is addressed to a specific listener present – and a written text created for a general, distant, public" (p. 280).

Consequently, the crisis of representation questions the value of the art of interpretation, as it reframes the research text as just one of many potentially different representations of different experiences (Denzin, 1997). This questioning of textual value is closely linked to the crisis of legitimation, which is concerned with the problem of how to judge the quality or authority of a research text. This additional crisis recognises that there are no objective ways to judge the worth of research. Thus, the legitimation crisis accepts, but is concerned, that judgements on the worth of research are all subjectively based. The main premise that underpins the crisis of legitimation is closely related to what Foucault believes has been the central issue of philosophy and critical thought since the eighteenth century, which is attempting to answer: "What is this Reason that we use?" (Rabinow, 1984, p. 249).

The dual and blurred crises of representation and legitimation shape and define our present situation in interpretive research (Denzin, 1997). As Denzin (1997) notes " . . . the world we encounter is neither neat nor easy to make sense of" (p. 14). Hence, this present situation (which has been labelled as the fifth moment of qualitative research) is characterised by tensions, uncertainties, contradictions and hesitations but also, hope, new experimental writings and increasingly, more reflexive interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Sparkes,



1995). In many respects, I believe that these characteristics are reflective of the messy way that people negotiate meaning within our postmodern world. Thus, a certain symmetry exists between research in the fifth moment and postmodern interpretations of social reality (e.g. Jameson, 1984).

## LEGITIMATION TECHNIQUES OF POSITIVIST RESEARCH

Traditional social science (e.g. positivism) legitimation revolves around terms such as validity, generalisability, replicability and reliability. These terms reflect the epistemological goal of finding universal or objective truths. This goal is incongruent with the aims of interpretivists who hold subjective views of knowledge construction (Bruce & Greendorfer, 1994). Interpretivists, therefore, need to discard or at least rework these positivist terms of legitimation.

Denzin (1997), furthermore, argues that postpositivists follow a set of epistemological rules for textual validity (e.g. triangulation, grounding or respondent validation) that lie outside their research project and therefore reflect the conception of a hard reality. These rules allow a text to bear "witness to its own validity. . . . The text's author then announces these validity claims to the reader. Such claims now become the text's warrant to its own authoritative representation of the experience and social world under investigation" (Denzin, 1997, p. 7). Denzin's argument of postpositivist validity provides a clear example of Foucault's (1978) notion of the intimate linking between discourse, knowledge and power. The postpositivist *discourse* on rules of textual validity allows these researchers to claim their research findings (*knowledge*) as authoritative and truly representative of social reality, which gives them further authority to exercise *power* over the reader. My concern with this style of knowledge legitimation is that it allows for regimes of truth to "expand, engulf and oppress" (Gergen, 1994, p. 413). To help illustrate this potential abuse of knowledge and power, and, why the legitimation crisis should not be dismissed as epistemological esotericism, I will briefly provide an example related to the body, medical discourse and power relations.

The growth and acceptance of the scientific approach, which developed in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, helped provide authority for the biomedical viewpoint to dominate Western thinking and be of significant influence on how we view our bodies, disease, and the power of medicine (Jones, 1994). Foucault (1973) shows how the clinical gaze of doctors reconceptualises the body as an anatomical machine, through which the signs and symptoms of disease can be objectively studied and treated through a reliance on naturalistic science. All diseases can be understood in biological terms, and health perceived in mechanical terms of cause and effect.

The contemporary dominance of this biomedical discourse provides medical doctors with "greater power in relation to patients and to other health personnel" (Jones, 1994, p. 422). This medical discourse, therefore, assumes a passive patient, "one who is ignorant of her body and its functions and/or who is subservient to the medical profession and its practices" (Betschild & Simmons, 1998). This dominance can act to marginalise individuals' truths with respect to their body and well-being. For example, the positive health benefits of physical activity have been intuitively known for many centuries, but it is only since the late 1980s when science "discovered" this knowledge, that medical doctors have strategically started to encourage patients to be more active (Pringle, 1998a). Thus, prior to the 1980s health beliefs about physical activity were marginalised due to

the dominance of biomedicine. Physical education, for example, has had a history of struggle for recognition and prominence within educational settings. Although partially pleased that physical activity health benefits have been legitimised, I am wary that physical activity may now be absorbed into medical discourse. Doctors now write exercise prescriptions, which aim to transform activity into a medical treatment, which could act to marginalise the simple joys of movement.

Nevertheless, I did not provide this example to argue for the removal of the biomedical perspective. Much biomedical knowledge *can* clearly be very useful. The purpose of this example was to show that researchers need to be careful how they use knowledge (Noblit, 1993). Foucault (1978), for example, informs that academic knowledge is neither inherently good or bad, but, that we should be concerned with the ethical use of knowledge, as knowledge can be used with or without a sense of caring. Thus, all researchers need to be wary that methods of research legitimation, particularly the positivist's method that relies on external claims of authority, will have political consequences which could result in the (re)construction of inequitable power relations. Through this example I hope to have highlighted the importance of challenging a text's external claims for authority, and the need to use different criteria of judgement for interpretive research. But what should these interpretive criteria look like?

## INTERPRETIVE CRITERIA FOR RESEARCH LEGITIMATION

In our postmodern world of multiple truths and realities, there are multiple ways of viewing research and knowledge. There is not one set of research criteria that can be used to judge the value of all research, and, nor should we search for a set of transcendent criteria (Bruce & Greendorfer, 1994). We need to *accept* and *welcome* numerous approaches to interpretive textual legitimation. However, this acceptance should not be regarded as anything goes, because each interpretive research genre (e.g. cultural studies, interpretive interactionism or narrative therapy) operates within a set of agreed-upon research assumptions and has, therefore, developed and trialed its own criteria of textual judgment (Sparkes, 1995). For example, in some research approaches, such as interpretive interactionism (Denzin, 1989), or grounded theory, there exist relatively explicit judgement criteria (Bruce & Greendorfer, 1994). But for other research genres such as discourse analysis the criteria are less specific and revolve around a general set of guidelines.

Each of these sets of criteria of judgement should not be viewed as being set in stone, for we should expect that the criteria will be constantly negotiated and, if necessary, modified with respect to each researcher's localised set of research assumptions. Sparkes (1995) states, "the terrain upon which judgements are made is continually shifting and is characterised by openness rather than stability and closure" (p. 185). With new approaches to research writings I appreciate that appropriate criteria may still be unknown or still be in the process of evolving (Eisner, 1997). Therefore, if we want to push the boundaries of accepted social science writing styles and search for new methods of knowing which will offer possibilities for new insights, we need to welcome the risk of traversing where no criteria may exist (Richardson, 1994; Rinehart, 1998; Sparkes, 1995).

This traversing is not as risky as it may sound, because there is a general picture of what the criteria for judgement of research in the fifth moment should be. Denzin argues that the criteria should stem from the "qualitative project, stressing subjectivity, emotionality, feeling, and other antifoundational criteria"

(1997, p. 9). Furthermore, if the mask of external validity has been removed so that a text does not rely on objective epistemology, the text should be reflective of a raw set of values and politics, which "exposes the heart of the argument" (Denzin, 1997, p. 9).

The sets of criteria of judgement that exist in the interpretive research communities can be regarded as forms of epistemological verisimilitude, or as "valid" exemplars of generally agreed-on interpretive research standards (Denzin, 1997). Given the recognition that there exists these various sets of interpretive criteria, we should not assume the crisis of legitimation has been solved. Denzin (1997) regards epistemological verisimilitude as another type of mask, other than the positivist mask that a text can wear, so that the reader can be convinced that the text has followed the laws of its research genre. In other words, epistemological verisimilitude is another political tool used by the researcher, to convince the reader that reality has been faithfully represented given the localised context. Denzin (1997) argues as follows with regard to the problematics of the acceptance of epistemological verisimilitude:

The truth of the text cannot be established by its verisimilitude. Verisimilitude can always be challenged. Hence, a text can be believed to be true while lacking verisimilitude. (The opposite case holds as well.) Challenges to verisimilitude in qualitative research rest on the simple observation that a text is always a site of political struggle over the real and its meanings. Truth is political, and verisimilitude is textual. The meaning of each of these terms is not in the text but rather brought to it by the reader. Here is the dilemma. Ethnographers can only produce messy texts that have some degree of verisimilitude; that is, texts that allow the readers to imaginatively feel their way into the experiences that are being described by the author. If these texts permit a version of . . . naturalistic generalisation (the production of vicarious experience), then the writer has succeeded in bringing "felt" news from one world to another. Little more can be sought (pp. 12-13).

If we recognise verisimilitude as another mask, we are reminded that there are multiple masks and multiple truths, and a political question once again emerges: whose verisimilitude or version of reality or truth should we believe? But this fundamental question, in essence, has already been asked, and the crisis of legitimation indicates that there are no completely satisfying answers to this question (Denzin, 1997). This is why I believe the legitimation issue is aptly named as a "crisis", because it inevitably throws doubt over the value of the research process. And importantly, if we accept that there are no right answers to this crisis, it raises another important issue: how, as interpretive researchers, do we cope with this crisis?

Given my subjectivist epistemology, I believe that there are no universal solutions for researchers with how to cope with the crisis. However, I believe that there is value in hearing about how other researchers cope, and in the final section I will outline my own coping strategy.

### **MY "MESSY" COPING STRATEGY FOR THE CRISES**

My coping strategy stems from my research paradigm, or more specifically my social constructionist stance, which highlights (amongst other beliefs) the

localisation of truth and the inherent politics of research. Both of these points, which are closely linked, play a major role in how I cope with the crises.

Firstly, social constructionism informs that truth is negotiated at a local level, and therefore, I believe that the truth or value of my research will primarily occur when an individual reads my research. Consequently, I prefer not to use the word "legitimation", when thinking of how my research may be valued, as legitimation conjures up impressions of research being officially sanctioned or authorised in some grand manner. Thus in part, I cope with the dual crises by aiming to have my work not officially legitimated, and by not making grand attempts to capture and represent the truth. This statement should not be interpreted to mean that I am satisfied by doing mediocre research, but, that I do not aspire to do what I believe is epistemologically unattainable.

Secondly, as social constructionism highlights the close link between knowledge and power (Foucault, 1978), I can gain a sense of satisfaction if I believe my research will be politically helpful for individuals or if it challenges readers to critically reflect on their own beliefs. It is through critical reflection, or in the words of Freire (1976) a "concientization", that one can start to "discover the myths that deceive us and help to maintain the oppressing dehumanising structures" (p. 225). Consequently, if I think that I have achieved these political aims, then I will judge that my research is of value.

Unfortunately, this personal process of judging is in itself problematical. Let me explain. As I acknowledge that the value of my research will, in part, be decided by the reader, and as there is often little or no contact between the reader and myself, I recognise that I will often receive little feedback on the value of my work. Furthermore, I acknowledge that if I do receive feedback from several readers, it will be representative of each individual's subjective beliefs, and at various times it may be contradictory. For example, I recently presented a paper at a conference which provided a critical and pro-feminist reading of the television commentary of a rugby test match (Pringle, 1998b). In my presentation I expressed concern with how the commentary glorified a particularly violent incident (which resulted in the need for full reconstructive surgery on an injured player's shoulder), and the potential implications of this commentary with respect to the social construction of masculinity. The oral feedback I received from this presentation was lively. A well-known rugby journalist critiqued it as an "ivory tower-politically correct" attack on rugby that was disrespectful to our national game, whereas several other audience members provided supportive comments on the value of, and need for, my research. In addition, I have subsequently received some written feedback from two academics on this paper; one essentially suggested that I soften my stance, but the other suggested that I came across as too neutral and urged my paper to be more forceful. So, who do I believe? Once again I am faced with the dilemma of how to judge the quality or value of my work.

Although using feedback from academic referees or other readers can be particularly useful, especially for getting published, it can highlight the subjectivity of different ways of knowing and it still does not provide a tight solution to the legitimation crisis. Consequently, I have realised that I need my own criteria to judge the quality of research.

The development of my research criteria hinged on the realisation that how I write about our social world (i.e. undertake research) must be consistent with how I view social reality, the nature of people and issues associated with knowledge construction. My research criteria, therefore, developed from an in-depth investigation of my ontological, epistemological and methodological beliefs.

I admit that throughout this investigation I occasionally wondered about the relevance of examining, for example, the issue of human agency or what truth means. However, I now recognise the value of this philosophical examination as it has resulted in the development of my research paradigm and this paradigm now guides my research process. It influences how I write (e.g. first person as opposed to absent author), the type of research questions I ask (e.g. primarily *how* or *what* questions as opposed to *why*), my research methodology (e.g. ideographic as opposed to nomothetic), and even the goals of my research (e.g. to be "politically" useful as opposed to revealing universal truths). And importantly, these research guidelines help provide a personal framework for judging the quality of research.

Furthermore, this paradigmatic examination has helped me believe that there is a coherent logic between my overall research process, and my understanding of how language acquires its meaning (Wittgenstein, 1958), my understanding of truth (Sparkes, 1992), my interpretation of knowledge and power (Foucault, 1978), and overall, my social constructionist perspective of social reality (Burr, 1995). I can, therefore, reflect that the manner in which I undertake research is at least ontologically and epistemologically coherent, given my set of beliefs.

Because my research paradigm is a reflection of how I view our convoluted social world (e.g. with inconsistencies and contradictions), I recognise that the research guidelines that stem from my paradigm are not definitive. Consequently, I have an expectation that the research process will never be straightforward and that my conclusions will be open to change. Thus, although I enjoy many aspects of research, I can at various times find the process to be frustrating. Nevertheless, I keep myself relatively content with researching under the dual crises, as long as I continue to reflect that I write with a sense of philosophical coherence, and with a celebration for the inherent politics of research, that is, with an ethic of caring.

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