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AUTHOR	Lincoln, Yvonna S.; Guba, Egon G.
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ABSTRACT

Research on the assessment of naturalistic inquiries is reviewed, and criteria for assessment are outlined. Criteria reviewed include early foundational and non-foundational criteria, trustworthiness criteria, axiomatic criteria, rhetorical criteria, action criteria, and application/transferability criteria. Case studies that are reports of naturalistic inquiries should meet the following criteria: (1) provide a sense of vicarious "deja vu" experience; (2) allow for use as a metaphor; and (3) allow for use as a basis for re-examining and reconstructing one's own construction of a given phenomena. Product criteria are as important as are process criteria, and studies that can be shown to meet these product criteria will fulfill important functions within the emergent paradigm. Such studies will: resonate with the basic assumptions or axioms of the naturalistic paradigm; exemplify the interpersonal involvement that characterized the form of inquiry; and empower, activate, and stimulate the reader. (TJH)

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING NATURALISTIC INQUIRIES AS REPORTS

Yvonna S. Lincoln
Vanderbilt University

and

Egon G. Guba
Indiana University

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Introduction

The paradigm debate has sparked more than just a struggle for legitimacy or primacy of one inquiry model over another. Increasing acceptance of emergent-paradigm inquiry has moved the debate past the "right-wrong", qualitative-quantitative, rigorous-sloppy controversies and toward a more productive dialectic regarding how consumers can judge the products of inquiry from emergent-paradigm research. Among those most interested in this new dialectic are not only researchers utilizing the paradigm (or traditions within the paradigm [Jacob, 1988]) but also persons chairing dissertation committees for students who wish to conduct this model of research, persons and agencies commissioning naturalistic research and evaluations, and, more importantly, editors who increasingly find case studies or reports coming across their desk for review and publication. Thus, there is an entire educational research community vexed with problems of judging such work.

The Problem

Emergent- paradigm inquiry--as a complete epistemological and philosophical inquiry system--is still in its infancy. Several hundred years of experience with and refinement of positivist thought have lent an air of authority to deliberations about goodness within the conventional paradigm. In philosophical terminology, the rules for discourse are established, the language clear and unequivocal, and the community well-grounded in both metaphysics and method (Harre, 1987). The conventions for traditional research (form and format, such as those setting forth the recomment format for A.E.R.A. proposals, i.e., objectives, theoretical framework, methods, data sources, results and conclusions, and significance) are well understand and adhered to.

Criteria for judging the goodness of naturalistic inquiries, on the other hand, are still being developed, especially for judging the goodness of case studies as narrative reports, that is, as products. In previous work (Guba, 1981; Lincoln, 1986, 1987; Lincoln & Guba, 1986, 1987) we have described, under the rubrics of trustworthiness and authenticity, several classes of criteria appropriate for judging the goodness of naturalistic inquiries as a process. But aside from specifying that the product of an emergent-paradigm (or naturalistic) inquiry ought to be a case study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985)--the form and content for which are still under debate--not much has been done until this time in proposing criteria by which such cases-as-reports (products) might be judged (Zeller, 1986).

Earlier foundational and non-foundational criteria

Early attempts to respond to critics of naturalistic inquiry focussed on foundational criteria for assessing process: That is, conventional inquirers, anxious and uneasy about the "rigor" question, demanded evidence that research grounded in a qualitative and phenomenological tradition could be judged and found systematically congruent with the context (valid), not subject to aberrations in the research process or instrument (reliable), and not open to charges of bias, prejudice or political agenda of the principal investigator (objective).

The first attempts to answer such questions from the research community led to parallel, or foundational, criteria, addressed to the process of inquiry, enabling researchers to make substantive claims to the congruence, coherence, stability and freedom from untrackable bias in their inquiries. The first attempt, addressed straightforwardly to fieldwork method, and drawing from the anthropological/ethnographic tradition, explicated four criteria for making authenticity assessments, and delineated which of established field methods could aid in making such judgments. In that statement, the "truth value" (internal validity), applicability (external validity), consistency (reliability) and neutrality (objectivity) were systematically considered and rendered into criteria suitable for process judgments in naturalistic research. "Suitable" in this instance means that positivist criteria were specifically rejected on grounds of their incompatibility with the axioms of naturalistic research, and terms less freighted with positivist meaning adopted which were more congruent with emergent axioms. The four terms credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were established as the naturalist's equivalents for the more conventional rigor criteria of internal validity, external validity, reliablity and objectivity. The terms were adopted for the single purpose of making clear"the inappropriateness of the conventional terms when applied to naturalistism and to provide a more logical and derivative relation to the naturalistic axioms" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.301).

Two other attempts were made to develop criteria more suitable to emergent-paradigm inquiry. The first of these originally arose in the context of evaluation. Practitioners of emergent-paradigm evaluation raised the question, "How does this form of evaluation facilitate the action desired for and implied by stakeholder involvement in design, data collection & analysis, and interpretation?" But it soon became apparent that the same question could be asked about emergent-paradigm inquiry of all forms, if the term stakeholder could be understood in its broad sense of inquiry participants and respondents. While research, evaluation, and policy analysis differ in certain fundamental ways (Lincoln & Guba, 1986), all three can be implemented methodologically in the new-paradigm framework and hence should be testable for quality or goodness (in the sense of disciplined inquiry) by using similar criteria.

Arguing from considerations of stakeholder (participant, respondent) utility, inquiries are deemed to be authentic (analogous to the conventional term rigor) when they fulfill canons of fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity and tactical authenticity. Briefly, those terms may be defined, respectively, as: "a balanced view that presents all constructions and the values that undergird them" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985a, p. 78); the ability of the inquiry to raise consciousness, or to unite divided consciousness, via a dialectical process, so that an individual may achieve a more informed and sophisticated construction; the achievement, via the inquiry process, of an "increased understanding of...the whats and whys of various expressed constructions;" the facilitation and stimulation to action, or feedback-action validity; and the empowerment of all persons at risk or with something at stake so as to enable them to influence and control the process by providing practice in the use of power (Ibid., pp. 78-82).

Thw second effort to devise more suitable criteria arose in response to the ethical probelms of deception and to the more widespread problem of what might be called "the license to inaction" (Lincoln, 1986, p. 21) (p.21) usually associated with most social action research (which is typically much more social than action).

Additional formulations of trustworthiness criteria

Clearly, this is not a problem which has occurred in a vacuum. Others have attempted to respond to the call for criteria by formulating approaches which are more foundational (Miles and Huberman, 1984) to less foundational (Marshall 1985; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Smith 1987). Miles and Huberman, for instance, suggest many of the tactics currently in use in conventional, positivist inquiry: testing for representativeness, for researcher bias, triangulating data sources, searching for rival hypotheses or explanations of data, and searching for negative cases (negative case analysis) (1984, pp. 230 ff.).

The work, however, of Marshall (1985) and Smith (1987) contribute substantially to the criteria debate, since both begin with premises which support the contention that qualitative research requires trustworthiness criteria which are epistemologically singular and embedded within the tradition, not derivative of canons outside the philosophical system within which such traditions grew. As Marshall points out, the first response, that of Miles and Huberman (1984) is essentially "to work within the dominant paradigm, construct higher standards, more exact definitions, and more refined techniques for proving how what we know is so" (1985, p. 366). The other avenue which we might travel is to "...grasp the ideas of the challenging paradigm, seek appropriate methods, questions, data sources, and insights and develop suitable methods to communicate findings" (1985, p. 366).

Smith's (1987) guidelines for publishing qualitative research act on the premises of Marshall's second suggestion. The attempt there was to trace the historical roots of several traditions in ethnographic research (the interpretive, artistic, systematic, and theory-driven approaches), and to demonstrate that each of these traditions, while subsumed under the rubric of qualitative research, essentially forces separate and distinct criteria to be brought to bear in judging trustworthiness and/or goodness.

Judging the process, while critical in understanding the premises under which the research was carried out and in understanding why the case study takes on the form it does, as Smith (1987) suggests, is a very different activity from judging the quality of the product of an inquiry, prototypically a case study in this type of research. Process judgments can tell the reader something about the trustworthiness and authenticity of a given study, but they say little about the quality of the narrative which is presented. Since the ability of a given case study to evoke a vicarious response is directly related to its quality as a narrative, criteria for judging the goodness of the product (case study) are coequally critical with criteria for judging the goodness of the process. Following that argument, the objectives of this paper were to: 1) propose a set of criteria by which products of emergent-paradigm, particularly naturalistic, studies might be judged; 2) link those criteria to the philosophical axioms which comprise naturalistic inquiry; that is, create a non-foundational set of criteria grounded not in considerations relevant to conventional inquiry, but rather to naturalistic inquiry; and 3) discuss the links of these criteria to naturalistic inquiry, e.g., the transferability of findings to a second setting.

Drawing on and extending the work of Zeller (1987) and our own previous work, we would like to describe and explicate four classes of criteria which address the goodness of products of naturalistic (emergent-paradigm) inquiry. These products, we have already argued, are prototypically case studies rather than more conventional technical reports (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The four classes are as follows: axiomatic criteria, rhetorical criteria, action criteria, and application or transferability criteria. We shall take each in turn.

Axiomatic criteria

By axiomatic criteria we mean the criteria that demonstrate the resonance between the case study as written and the axioms that characterize the basic belief system undergirding emergent-paradigm inquiry. The basic belief system is twofold: ontological and epistemological. At the ontological level, both conventional and emergent paradigms rest on three axioms that deal with the nature of reality, causality, and generalizabilty, while at the epistemological level, both rest on axioms dealing with objectivity and value-freedom. If a case study is to resonate with the naturalistic versions of these axioms, it must, at the very least: reflect the multiple realities constructed by the respondents to such research; demonstrate in what ways it has taken account of the mutual shaping of phenomenal elements on the site, relying on pattern theories rather than on conventional formulations of cause and effect; reject generalizability and the drawing of nomothetic conclusions and avoid making recommendations which look like or which can be interpreted as generalizations; must display and openly take account of the value influences that impinge on the research, including the values which dictated the choice of a problem, the values which impelled the choice of theoretical formulation or framework (if any), the values dictating the choice of paradigm, and the values inherent in the research site(including those of all stakeholder groups), and those of the investigator himself or herself; and finally, must reflect the investigator's involvement in such a way as to make clear that objectivity, being unachieveable in any event, is not the aim of the inquiry.

With respect to the latter of the five, a portion of the case study probably ought to be given over to considerations of conscious reflexivity. That is, some portion of the methodological treatment ought to comprise reflections on the investigator's own personal experience of the fieldwork. (Punch,) Any case study is a construction itself: a product of the interaction between site and researcher. As such, this construction is rooted in the person -- the character, experience, content, philosophy -- of the constructor. That constructor, the researcher, has an obligation to be self-examining, self-questioning, self-challenging, self-critical, and self-correcting. Any case study should reflect these intensely personal processes on the part of the inquirer.

Rhetorical criteria

By rhetorical criteria, we mean those relating to the form and structure, or the presentational characteristics, of the case study. Zeller (1987) has attempted to develop four criteria which are "imposed by the dictates of good writing" (197-8).

First, a case study might be judged on the criterion of unity. Unity suggests that the components of a naturalistic study are "well-organized" and that they "should advance some central idea, either initially or eventually discernible to the reader" by means of the narrative structure (1987, p. 198). But the idea of unity goes beyond organization and the advancement of some central idea. It encompasses structural characteristics such as coherence and corroboration. By coherence, we mean to assert that the case study must exhibit a unique internal consistency, logic and harmony. By corroboration, we mean that the proofs for assertions which are made, for conclusions which are drawn, from meanings which are inferred, from metaphoric usages attempted, must be internally substantiated and self-evident from the way in which data are displayed. In short, there ought not to be loose ends, stories left dangling, or characters from the cast who disappear.

The second criterion posed by Zeller is that of overall organization. Here, fictional elements assume a greater importance, and the case study might be judged as one would judge the structure of a novel or short story (or any other piece of fiction). Is the exposition pointed, is there rising action, climax, falling action? From whose point of view is the story being told: first person, second person, or third person (Zeller, 1987, pp. 198-99)?

The third criterion is that of simplicity or clarity. It has been argued that a strength of the case study is its access-i[illegible] to many persons who could not comprehend a typical scien-t[illegible] Simplicity and clarity are achieved by the "[illegible] onstruction of sentences (shunning inappropriate usage of the third person and passive voice), through rigorous editing, and through avoidance of jargon or technical language" (Zeller, 1987, p. 201). The use of "natural language", or the language, terms and meanings of respondents, aids and abets making the case report more accessible, since the language of those social scientists study is often vastly different from the style of scientific prose, which is "a stripped-down, cool style that avoids ornamentation" in the interests of "empty[ing] language of emotion and convinc[ing] the reader of the writer's disengagement from the analysis" (Firestone, 1987, p.17). The language of the street and community is not the language of the scientific establishment. Re-capturing the more natural language of respondents is more than mere insertion of appropriate quotations from field notes at modest intervals. It involves the selection and arraying of arguments framed in ways which engage and "maximize the reader's interest and involvement" (Zeller, 1987, p. 199), and which are "rich with the sense of human encounter" (Stake).

Finally, Zeller contends that writing a case study which fulfils the requirements of rhetorical criteria demands craftsmanship. Writing, rewriting, and writing again and again are probably the only techniques for advancing the art of craftsmanship. But it is evident when we see it. Some of the elements of craftsmanship which are evident in already extant case studies, particularly those which have come to be classics over the years, are clear when a textual analysis is done. We believe --without any direct proof -- that craftsmanship, careful writing, is apparent when a narrative exhibits some or all of the following characteristics.

- It has power and elegance. The case study-as-construction should be characterized by grace, on the one hand, and by precision on the other. The case study should be examined for its level of discourse; for the incisiveness of vocabulary; heuristic and evocative value of the metaphors employed; the degree of insightfulness; and its rhetorical function, or persuasiveness.

- It is creative. The case study should go a step beyond present constructions and understandings, proposing novel ideas and/or new grounds for negotiation of a reconstruction. This creativity may express itself as providing latent meanings for manifest understandings, by exhibiting playfulness or irony in achieving understanding or communication, or by the posing of as-yet unanswered or answerable questions, which, when dealt with, will break new ground.

- It is open and problematic. The case study should be open to negotiation and reconstruction. Its tentative, exploratory and problematic character should be clear to the reader. The case study itself should propose actions that might lead to its own reconstruction or reinterpretation, including especially ways in which it can be tested against other constructions.

- <u>It is independent</u>. A personal construction is the most examined position to which an individual can come. Therefore, a construction ought not to be a passive acceptance and/or restatement of someone else's construction (a "received view", in the words of feminists). Rather, it should be the product of an active process, a kind of personal hermeneutic which has forced the constructor to shed false consciousness in some form, and which takes into account the world-as-experienced by the constructor. The writing should demonstrate the intellectual wrestling that the writer went through in coming to his or her conclusions, and should demonstrate the writer's ability to think "outside" that construction to which he or she may have been socialized. In other instances, it will mean that the same setting will be presented very differently from two different researchers working at the same time, if one is a male and the other female, since he will "experience" the setting in a masculinist manner, while she may experience the setting in a feminist manner. The constructions are separate, independent ways of knowing, and both must be honored for the rhetorical criterion of independence to be met.

- <u>It should demonstrate the writer's emotional and intellectual commitment to it.</u> It ought not to appear to be "thrown together", for the sake of an assigment or contract. It should demonstrate the face that you have developed the construction as far as present knowledge and sophistication permit. It should display passion in advancing the construction.

- <u>It should display courage</u>. The construction should be extended beyond "safe" limits. It should display a certain element of risk-taking, of putting the writer's egor. on the line, of invitation to criticism. The writer should be willing to stand behind the construction and to act in accordance with it, social pressures notwithstanding.

- <u>It should display egalitarianism</u>. A given construction should demonstrate the assumption of an egalitarian stance with respect to other persons (for instance, respondents and informants) with whim one may come into contact while discharging the professional inquiry role. While all constructions are not equally informed and sophisticated, all persons have the moral right to have their constructions respected and presented. Disagreements should be negotiated, not overruled by virtue of a superior position of power which the writer may hold. The effect of an egalitarian posture is to empower all significant others equally.

Clearly, not all case studies will display all criteria equally strongly. Nevertheless, elements of all the rhetorical criteria ought to be explicit or implicit in a reading of the study. Fulfillment of the rhetorical criteria ought to be apparent either in the methodological section of the case study, or in the case study itself.

Action criteria

By action criteria we mean the ability of the case study to evoke and facilitate action on the part of readers. Such criteria include fairness, educativeness, and actionability (Lincoln and Guba, 1986a), or the power of such an inquiry to enable those whom it affects directly or indirectly to take action on their circumstances or environments, or those environments in which they are significant others (for instance, an inquiry might be facilitative of a professor whose major responsibility is the teaching of a mathematics methods course to enable his or her students teachers to understand better how students acquire math concepts). The actionability criterion might also be thought of as the empowerment criterion.

At the lease, this may imply consciousness-raising. Perhaps it means providing arguments that readers can use in their own situations should they attempt action based on the case report. The latter surely means that case studies should avoid ending their narratives with "suggestions for further research". It means that case studies ought to present action alternatives for those who are persuaded by the same studies. It means making clear what action steps are indicated by the inquiry -- not just what we have found, but where does what we have found say about where we should be going?

We have often argued that naturalistic inquiry properly carried out obliterates the distinction, common to conventional (positivistic) inquiry, between basic and applied inquiry. If that is the case, then one might well ask, how can you tell whether the case report does indeed facilitate action on the basis of its findings? The answer is not totally clear to us, but one way of answering the question is by ascertaining whether or not the case points the way to action based on the findings and insights.

Application or transferability criteria.

By application/transferability criteria we mean the extent to which the case study facilitates the drawing of inferences by the reader that may have applicability in his or her own context or situation (inferences, however, not to be confused with generalizations, which are context-free and time-free laws regarding human behavior). Under the term transferabilitv we have earlier argued (Guba, 1981; Lincoln and Guba, 1985) that transference can take place between contexts A and B if B is sufficiently like A on those elements or factors or circumstances that the A inquiry found to be significant (and those salience factors will vary from inquiry to inquiry). In order to make that judgment possible for a reader we have said that there should be "thick description", not in the sense of long and detailed -- although such may be necessary -- but in the sense in which Clifford Geertz (1973)used the term, the sense of making clear levels of meaning.

But that is surely only one level at which we can discuss this situation. How else could a case study make it possible for a reader to draw out applications which might prove useful for his or her own situation? We would suggest at least three ways in which this might occur.

First, a case might provide a sense of vicarious, "deja vu" experience. In this situation, a reader can "learn" from the experience, and, as is the case with all learning, make application even in situations that do not appear on their face to be similar. If one is a principal in a school, and is reassigned to another school, however different from the first, the first experience "stands one in good stead". So one criterion on this category is whether or not vicarious experience is provided.

It is important to note here that under rhetorical criteria, we argued for many of the elements which make for good style in all forms of narrative writing, particularly essays and novels. In both of those forms, the powers of persuasion and vicarious experience are critical in judging the success of the work itself. Thus, elements which may be called rhetorical criteria are those very elements which render the "experience" of a case study vicarious; that is, fulfilling rhetorical criteria can buttress a positive judgment on applicability criteria. Criteria for judging products are inter-related, and strength on one set of criteria may contribute to strength on another set, just as strength and power in some forms of quantitative analyses may be thought of as lending strength on other criteria (e.g., robustness of analytic technique may lend "certainty" to conclusions). The important point to be made here is that criteria may enhance or undermine each other.

Second, a case might be used as a metaphor, or used in a metaphoric sense. Guba (1978), citing Burke (1969, p. 503) and Petrie (1976, p. 40), noted that a metaphor is "a device for seeing something in terms of something else", or that it may be "conceived of broadly as encompassing visual metaphors and even theories -- models as they are often called in the sciences", respectively. In metaphors, usually two terms and the relationships between them are utilized to extend understandings. The first term, the <u>subject term</u> (or topic, tenor, or principal subject) is "that term which the metaphor is intended to illuminate....The second term,...the <u>metaphoric term</u>, is that term which [is] used to illuminate the subject term...[and] is also called] the vehicle, the referent, or the subsidiary subject" (Guba, 1978, p. 7-8). The two relationships between the subject and metaphoric term which are important for the purposes of this criterion are the <u>ground</u> and the <u>tension</u>. Ground refers to the way in which the subject and metaphoric terms are alike, and the meaning of the metaphor cannot "be comprehended unless the ground is understood by[means of]the subject". On the other hand, the tension "of a metaphor 'is the literal incompatibility of the topic and the vehicle'" (Ortony, Reynolds and Arter, 1977, p.6) cited in Guba, 1978, p. 8), or the way in which the subject and the metaphoric term are dissimilar.

The learning which can then take place when the case serves as a metaphor is therefore two-fold: on the one hand, the case serves to provide fodder for thinking of the ways in which two situations are similar, and on the other hand, the "tension" aspect allows the reader to discover ways in which the contexts of the case and his or her own situation are different. Since the "ground" of the metaphor is usually implicit, rather than explicit, two additional problems are raised. First the reader must understand the implicit ground, or the way in which two things (the subject and metaphoric terms) are alike. And second, he or she must be able to utilize the tacit learnings that implicit grounds imply, make those tacit learnings more or less propositional (and therefore accessible to others), and act upon them.

Third and finally, a case could be used as a basis for re-examining and reconstructing one's own construction of a given phenomenon. The case may provide new (or better) information. It may raise the reader's level of sophistication. Or it may provide the interpretation critical to erasing false consciousness. In any case, examination of one's personal construction is called for, and such examination may well lead to a reconstruction. Some, if not all, case studies ought explicitly to invite the reader to that task, and make it possible to pursue it.

Conclusion

We have argued, that case studies which are reports of naturalistic inquiries (not all case studies will qualify under this definition) should meet the foregoing criteria. We have implied strongly that product criteria are as important as process criteria, and that studies which can be shown to meet these product criteria will fulfil important functions within the emergent paradigm. First, such studies will resonate with the basic assumptions or axioms of the naturalistic paradigm.

That is, the axioms will be exemplified in every way by the means and manner of the study's methodology or design strategy, and the final product of the inquiry will be composed with the emergent paradigm's worldview in mind.

Second, case studies will exemplify the interpersonal involvement which characterized that form of inquiry, making the reader an interactive partner with the writer in reaching understandings and drawing implications. We have suggested, in the section on rhetorical criteria, that the "stripped-down, cool" style of scientific, conventional technical reports ought to be replaced with language which demonstrates the passion, commitment and open political stance of the writer, eschewing the artificial neutrality which permeates most research reports. We have argued earlier that all research supports some political and social agenda and have tried to describe a rhetoric for products of naturalistic inquiry which would bring those agendas to the forefront of social action, where they may be debated in open forum, as a participatory democracy would demand.

Third, we have argued that case studies which can be shown to meet these criteria will empower, activate, and stimulate the reader to a level of responsive and use that does not characterize research reports typically.

We believe strongly (indeed, passionately) that even if on the last were all that could be accomplished, we would have begun a revolution in utilizing the products of social science research.

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