# Chapter 10
# Why Qualitative and Ethnographic Methods Are Essential for Understanding Family Life

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Qualitative and ethnographic research methods are essential for understanding family life. Qualitative and case study materials have been staples for family research throughout the social sciences from the beginning. Family histories, cultural contexts, everyday routines and practices, narratives, experiences, intentions, stories, triumphs, secrets, troubles, and pain all matter deeply, and are what families mean to us. This information surely deserves to be understood and used in our research. Without incorporating qualitative methods in family research, those aspects of family life can never be fully captured.

For very good *analytic* research reasons we want to include quantitative and other methods and systematic research designs. We make the necessary analytic assumptions, pretending that the world is linear and additive and predictable, that we can bracket out context, and that our analytic categories actually match the way families and households are constituted (Weisner and Duncan, in press). But the worlds of families are not linear and additive, and context matters profoundly. Qualitative methods, ethnography, and fieldwork provide essential ways to include rich detailed information found in family narrative. Thus, any concern over the use of qualitative methods certainly should not be whether such evidence can be valuable; it already is. The question rather is how best to collect such information in ways that are productive, meaningful, believable, and add value to research. In this chapter, I provide some examples of such research, suggest ways to assess the quality of qualitative work, and emphasize the value of integrating qualitative evidence with quantitative data.

Most theoretical frameworks in family research are open to qualitative evidence. For family research as for so many topics, *combining* biological substrate, ecological setting, beliefs and behaviors, and the experiences and meaning systems of individuals in families, all then followed through developmental time, is our widely accepted conceptual and heuristic framework. Family systems approaches, including Bronfenbrenner's model that blends "person, process, context and time" (Bronfenbrenner

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1995, 2005), provide conceptual frameworks that invite qualitative methods. Qualitative and ethnographic methods provide information on settings and contexts, and on the experiences, meaning systems and normative scripts that drive family life and *direct* our behavior (D'Andrade and Strauss 1992).

## Qualitative Methods: Epistemology and Integration with Other Methods

Qualitative understanding is not inherently incommensurate with other methods. Qualitative methods are very different, for sure, and might well be preferred over quantitative methods for understanding meanings, experience, interpretations, intentions, cultural models and scripts, and narratives and stories family members have about their world. Any method can be the preferred or best for addressing certain topics—for representing those topics effectively—but other methods can add value. A representational or correspondence approach to methods seems most useful; all methods attempt to describe and to represent, and claim they correspond to the world. Thus:

> . . . quantitative research [provides methods] of inquiry that analyze numeric representations of the world. Survey and questionnaire data as well as biological or physiological data are often analyzed in quantitative units. Inquiry that relies on qualitative methods collects and analyzes non-numeric representations of the world—words, texts, narratives, pictures, and/or observations. The epistemological assumption . . . is that in scientific endeavors, the world can be represented through both numbers and words and that numbers and words should be given equal status in [family research]. (Yoshikawa et al. 2008, p. 344)

There are ways to characterize qualitative methods other than to contrast them with quantitative methods, even though this dichotomy, and all that is associated with it, is the natural language paired opposite terminology. Hence, researchers are so often trained either in the "qualitative track" or "quantitative track" for methods, rather than the mixed methods track or the "narrative plus statistical track". For instance,

> Anthropologists have described methods as experience-near (representing the voices, intentions, meanings, and local rationality of parents and children in local settings) and experience-distant (representing the world of groups, institutions, and social address categories). Methods can be particularistic, capturing only a part of some phenomenon, or holistic, attempting to capture the whole context or situation . . . (Yoshikawa et al. 2008, p. 345).

Family researchers usually become specialists in specific methods and aspects of family life, but hopefully they do not become methodocentric. *Methodocentrism* is identification with or commitment to certain methods turned into a personal identity or ideology as opposed to considering methods as tools for representing the family topics we are trying to understand (Weisner 1996). ("I am a qualitative person; I defend such methods as unique and as more valuable and valid, and reject others," can be a methodocentric position.) Methodocentrism can lead to confusing the topics about family life we want to study (e.g., attachment, sibling relationships, family

budgeting, work-family balance) with particular methods for studying them (e.g., the Strange Situation, questionnaires, daily routine diaries, stress scales).

Donald Campbell (Webb et al. 1981) argued long ago that the reason for using multiple methods is that all methods are weak and are only partial indicators of the underlying events in the world we want to describe. We need qualitative methods alongside others because qualitative methods have strengths and weaknesses, just as do questionnaires and surveys. The weaknesses of naturalistic participant observations of family life or open-ended conversational interviews are complemented by the strengths of closed-ended surveys and 5-point scales on a questionnaire, *and vice versa*. A pluralist position with regard to methods does not in principle privilege one way of representing the world (numbers, or models) over another (narratives, text, fieldwork experiences). Of course some kinds of phenomena in the world are best represented by narrative experiences while others are best represented by numbers or models.

I do not want to give the impression that this expansive, positive view of qualitative methods is by any means universally agreed on, that there are no "paradigm wars", or that there is not a great deal of remaining ambiguity and interpretive work required for many kinds of ethnographic and qualitative methods in family research and the social sciences. In anthropology for example, qualitative methods, ethnography, and fieldwork seemingly are continually in a crisis of representation, practice, and meaning. Borneman and Hammoudi (2009) provide a recent overview of the variety of approaches to qualitative field research in anthropology, including ". . . anthropoesis, dialogism, genealogies of modernity, history, world system, transnationalism, autoethnography, the staging of multiple voices, science studies, simple activism, and critiques of knowledge through the study of constructed subjectivities" (p. 4).

*Any* research encounter involving fieldwork and a personal relationship with participants will be fraught with reflexivity, contingencies, unknown method effects, and situational influences. Every element of that method potentially then can be contextualized and critiqued.

> . . . fieldwork is the registering of sensory impressions in a (temporal) process of mutual subject-discovery and critique, an engagement with persons, groups, and scenes that takes into account the dynamics of our interactions as well as the differences between our locations and those of our interlocutors. (Borneman and Hammoudi 2009, p. 19)

The analysis of the fieldwork encounter itself then becomes a part of our interpretation of the evidence gathered through such encounters.

The reasons why qualitative fieldwork can be so highly contested ironically often are the same reasons that qualitative fieldwork is seen as essential for social science. The family and social world is of course constantly changing, unstable, and globalizing. Family life has multiple and contested meanings and embodies history (an intimate family history and the broader social, national, immigrant, and economic histories). The family and community units chosen to describe families themselves (e.g., nuclear, legally married) can predetermine our descriptions, analyses, and results and clearly do not fully represent this changing complex family world. Therefore, fixed quantitative methods and categories can not possibly fully

capture such family worlds today, and so we need more open, fluid, context-examined qualitative methods.

So qualitative inquiry and fieldwork involves some risk and uncertainty and requires some degree of openness. The method depends on the high likelihood that by ceding to our family participants some control over the research setting and collection of data, new evidence and understanding of family and community life will result in large part because of the openness, greater disclosure and shared ownership of the research partnership. Relations of greater dialogue and trust can and do then emerge in qualitative research and valuable information results.

## *Assessing Qualitative Research*

Criteria for assessing qualitative work exist and are used, though there certainly is less agreement on the criteria and on how to use them in contrast to assessing quantitative methods. As when assessing quantitative methods, a clear conceptual framework, sample description, design, participant consent, and evidence of effective study implementation can be used to assess qualitative and fieldwork studies. In addition, qualitative methods can effectively be assessed for their depth, richness and complexity of descriptions, breadth, ability to move across levels of analysis, veridicality (the use of specific exemplars and vignettes illustrating the topics and findings of interest), and holism. Incorporating the terms and concepts used by participants themselves, including their own explanatory models, reasons and motives offered to account for their actions are also important in qualitative data (Weisner 1996).

There are useful framing or checklist criteria for assessing studies that integrate qualitative and quantitative data (Greene 2007; Lieber 2009; Small 2011; Weisner 2005). Weisner and Fiese (2011) suggest these questions to ask of such research:

> Is the rationale for a mixed methods approach clearly specified? Are the qualitative and quantitative data systematically integrated in such a way that maximizes the strengths and minimizes the weaknesses of each approach? Is the form of data integration clearly specified? Do the authors clearly identify how they integrate quantitative and qualitative data either through merging, connecting, or embedding data (Creswell et al. 2011)? At what phase of the study was the mixed methods approach introduced (e.g., pilot phase, program evaluation, embedded in longitudinal study)? Is the method of data collection clearly specified for both the quantitative and qualitative data? If interviews or video recorded data were used, how were the questions or video samples derived? How were the qualitative data reduced and summarized? If the qualitative data were coded, how were the coders trained? What were the rules for transcription? How was consensus reached? If the report is part of a larger study (as many mixed method studies are embedded in larger studies), how is it distinct from other published reports or those under review? Do the textual or narrative examples provide sufficient detail (without being redundant) to illustrate key findings? Does the discussion highlight the advantages and limitations of a mixed methods approach? (p. 797)

Of course no study can nor has to include every element described above; studies are specific and can never account for all methodological challenges or contingencies. However, the point is that there are useful frameworks available for asking about the reliability, validity, and believability of qualitative work, and these are being used.

## The Suite of Qualitative, Ethnographic and Fieldwork Methods

Qualitative methods in family research often are thought of as consisting primarily of open-ended questions with probes in conversational interviews. Such interview methods are important but are certainly not the only qualitative method. Indeed, a large suite of approaches has been developed to represent family life. These include community participation and ethnographic observations (Bernard 2013). Ethnography in family research is the account of the way of life of a family or community using interviews and field participant observations. Fieldwork involves observing, talking with, and perhaps participating in the everyday lives of family members, often across settings beyond the household. In addition to narrative texts, qualitative work includes pictures, video, found objects, and observational methods. There are many kinds of participant and systematic observational methods, and many types of interviewing (informal conversations, guided conversations, use of probes, focus groups, and others). Gilgun (2012) identifies four characteristics of qualitative family research traditions in social welfare including the use of qualitative methods to capture experiences in context, extensive direct engagement with the family, interpretations grounded in individuals' accounts of their experiences, and research that looks toward promoting change and action.

How qualitative data are subsequently *analyzed* can be very different from how they were collected. Fieldnotes, interviews, and naturalistic video frequently are coded for quantitative analysis using standard criteria for reliability and validity. *Indexing* or "bucketing" is not the same as weighted coding with reliability tests. Indexing is used to mark off a long interview or excerpts from notes according to general topics (content related to health, or siblings, or academics or couple relationships and conflict) for analysis. The qualitative analytic process of "*structured discovery*" is common in qualitative and mixed methods work, during which the methods and subsequent analytic strategies remain open to unexpected processes and patterns yet focus on project-specific topics such as parenting, experiences with welfare systems, or family routines. "Grounded theory" is another analytic approach commonly described as a way to explore patterns by close, iterative listening, reading, and observing of the sample data (LaRossa 2005; Strauss and Corbin 1998).

Numerical as well as text data on family processes frequently co-exist within the same original qualitative study. Harkness et al. (2011) for example, reported on five family samples in five European and US communities focused on family time, meal times in families, play, and school-related or academic-promoting activities. The cultural meaning of these activities was important for understanding the time spent together by families. Interview text (the qualitative narrative accounts parents used to explain why they organized their routines as they did) was quantitatively scored, and typical days (quantitative data drawn from diaries and counts) were qualitatively summarized based on patterns found in the diary and questionnaire data. This analysis illustrated, as the authors put it, that "... qualities can be counted, and quantities can be described" (Harkness et al. 2011, p. 811).

## Uses of Qualitative and Ethnographic Fieldwork Methods in Family Studies

*Gaining participant trust and rapport.* One use of qualitative inquiry is very common: gaining greater levels of trust, familiarity, and rapport between researcher and participant. This closer relationship enhances data quality, engagement, and retention of research participants. Another technique is explicitly and actively bringing the research participant/subject into the *shared* data collection project. For example, our current La Vida family study has followed over four hundred 14- to 16-year-old Mexican–American adolescents in Los Angeles for two years (Andrew Fuligni, PI, Nancy Gonzalez and Thomas Weisner, co-PIs). The teens and parents complete daily diaries, questionnaires, and a structured survey interview. We also gather school records. In addition, 10 % of La Vida families, randomly sampled from the full study sample, agreed to be part of a qualitative and ethnographic study. They were interviewed in their homes using the Ecocultural Family Interview, a conversational interview with prompts and probes.

One may wonder how we engaged 14- to 16-year-old adolescents in an extensive, sometimes personal conversation about their lives for the first time and receive rich and informative accounts of their lives. (We actually obtain responses beyond "yeah; whatever; I dunno ...") In a visit prior to the interview visit our team gave the teens digital cameras and asked them to take 25 photos of people, places, objects, activities, or whatever was important to them in their lives. When we arrived for the interviews a few weeks later, we plugged those cameras into our laptops and started talking with the adolescents about the photos. Who is that? Oh, your girlfriend? Teacher? For which class? That's your soccer team.... That's your room, favorite music group poster, your Mom cooking dinner. What chores does she do and what do you do? Teens took photos *of other family photos*: their relatives in Mexico they could not see and missed. They took pictures of their small home shrines to saints or the Madonna, their churches, places they wanted to work someday (police station; restaurant; hospital; offices). The range of important family information embedded in those photos was often surprising and remarkable, and the engagement of the teens in talking with us about a wide range of topics was far greater than would have been true otherwise.

We did not have a sample of teens who were not asked to take photos, and we did not ask teens specifically about the value of photos in sharing information. No doubt, many features contributed to the usefulness of the photos: The teens were given an active, agentic role in the research process; nonverbal visual communication was comfortable for many; personal experiences could be indirectly captured in photos; people, contexts, and relationships could become a part of the narrative account and told a meaningful story; and the research questions about family life in our project often led off of the photo narratives. We repeated this process again a year later during our second qualitative home visit. We currently have an archive of over 1,000 photos linked to interviews that have been coded and linked to quantitative data on the adolescents and their family daily routines.

Our interview topics usually emerged simply by extending conversations from the photos. This study also used "show cards"—large-print laminated cards with phrases (e.g., family rules and responsibilities, daily routine, time together, trust and hidden activities, school, religion, future goals, work/income/money, financial stress, friends-peers-family, your family story/history) which we set out on the table or couch, reminding the interviewer and teen or parent of the topics to be discussed. Qualitative interviews are very open and conversational, but this does not mean they cannot be made more comparable. For example, we minimize false negatives in qualitative interviews by always bringing up core topics if the parent or teen does not bring them up themselves. The La Vida taped interviews are transcribed (and translated if in Spanish) and uploaded to web-based qualitative analysis software named Dedoose (Dedoose.com) for indexing (indexing and coding done through drag and drop code trees placed onto highlighted text), as well as reliable quantitative coding (reliability tests are automated within a Training Center in Dedoose, for example). These data are then linked to quantitative data (i.e., school achievement, survey and questionnaire scale summary scores, demographic data) in addition to the qualitative summary of patterns in the narratives (Steinberg 2012). Coded and indexed interview text, numerical summaries of code-by-code matrices, and Excel spreadsheets with quantitative summaries of codes and other quantitative measures, including charts and graphs, can be exported directly from software such as Dedoose, into Word or Excel for further analysis and inclusion in papers.

*Unpacking analytic categories; discovering new ones.* Another important use of qualitative and fieldwork methods is to unpack standard social address categories (conjugal, single mother, dual earner married, extended). Qualitative and ethnographic researchers use existing family categories, but researchers are in a better position to *question* the categories as they are closer to hearing and seeing who is in the home and why, what roles are played, and what happens over time (Roy et al. 2008). Qualitative methods allow for the study of the motivations, strategies, and intentions of family members themselves with regard to finding support, forming alliances, establishing co-residence, marrying, and so forth. Such work, at ground level so to speak, can then actually lead to the creation of new categories for more systematic study.

The household and relationship category of "living together apart (LTA)" is an example of a new discovery emerging from qualitative research. Frequent separations followed by reunifications and cohabitation of a couple along with (either partner's) children can create an LTA family unit. LTA households and families are very widespread in the US and throughout the world—yet there is no category for them conventionally available in census or survey work (Cross-Barnet et al. 2011). Of course family disruptions due to death, divorce, migration or many other reasons lead to episodic family and household formation, dissolution and reconstitutions. Cross-Barnet and colleagues identified a wide range of household formations, including "... stable marriages or cohabitations, serial cohabitations, intermittent cohabitations, LTAs, and abated unions (in which the mother does not engage in any romantic, sexual, or cohabiting relationship)...." (pp. 637–638). Each of these family formations was uncovered through close qualitative documentation of family life.

*Interpretation of experimental and intervention study findings using qualitative evidence.* Both qualitative and ethnographic evidence were important for the New Hope study and illustrate how such methods can be used in family and intervention research, and to better understand studies with experimental designs. New Hope (NH) was a successful poverty reduction program that offered a positive social contract to working-poor adults to support them and their families (Duncan et al. 2007; Yoshikawa et al. 2006). New Hope operated as a community organization in Milwaukee, Wisconsin for several years, from the mid- to-late 1990s. Participants who worked full time were eligible to receive significant income supplements (increasing income from the current level to 200 % of the federal poverty level), childcare vouchers which could be used at any licensed family care or center care facility, and health care benefits. Participants who did not have a job were given a community service job. All were shown client respect when they came to the NH office. Over 1300 adults in two low-income neighborhoods signed up for a lottery to participate in NH; half were randomly assigned to participate in the program, and half were not. Program and control participants and their families were followed for eight years from the time of their entry into NH. Surveys, questionnaires, teacher reports, and administrative data were all used to follow participants in the family study with children ages 1–12.

In addition, some 8 % of program and control families were randomly selected to participate in a qualitative and ethnographic study. They were visited multiple times in their homes for conversational interviews focused on the study topics and their lives and experiences. Topics included use of program benefits or use of other programs if in the control group, parenting, child care choices, work, marriage and partners, budgeting and income, substance use, religion, experiences of discrimination, education issues, and others (e.g., *tell us about birthdays, holidays*; *if you could talk to NH and other parents about your experiences, what would you say*). We listened to their stories in their own words, grounded in their own contexts and life experience. Our qualitative teams followed families in this subset for roughly six years. We summarized these interviews and home observations by topics and systematically coded or indexed them using web-based online software for team use. Both the coded qualitative data and the patterns of narratives from the interviews and notes were analyzed (Duncan et al. 2007; Weisner and Duncan, in press; Gibson and Weisner 2002; Weisner 2011b; Yoshikawa et al. 2006).

Quantitative and qualitative evidence in combination provided valuable information as the NH intervention played out in family lives. The qualitative sample suggested motives, strategies, and family circumstances which helped us understand what turned out to be selective take up of benefits, for example (Gibson and Weisner 2002). Developmental data showed that boys in program families benefited academically and in classroom behavior reports by teachers, relative to boys in the control families, while girls did not. This was a surprising result not easily explained from quantitative data. Some parents in the NH sample had a greater likelihood of marrying or finding stable partners than the control group. Women described how they sometimes got out of bad existing relationships, finally got their own housing and found some stability in their lives, thus making new relationships possible.

Qualitative evidence helped interpret results from quantitative data and treatment-control impact analyses (why boys did better, why some work trajectories were more successful, how subjects found new and often better partners, what was behind the selective take up of NH, how parents talked about their family—work balance choices and intentions, and how parents balanced supports they needed from kin and others, with the obligations and risks such supports also entailed). In other cases, qualitative evidence simply stood on its own as rich knowledge about the experiences and lives of working poor parents and their kids (their own definitions of "being a good mom", immigrant and migration stories, discrimination stories, the very strong importance of religion for some, and domestic violence situations). This is, at the end of the day, the reason for using qualitative methods in family research: Qualitative methods are core to and add very significant value to scientific understanding. This is the same standard as any method should be held to, and qualitative and ethnographic methods can more than meet this standard.

*Describing processes of family change over time.* Family life always includes fluid processes emerging over time, where there is strategic and tactical intention by family members. Qualitative methods are very effective at capturing these processes. "Kinscription" for example, is a family process term that came from qualitative evidence. Kinscription describes the constant attempts by single mothers to recruit and involve biological fathers, and other romantic/intimate partners and their kin, to help their families and be involved in their and their children's lives. Kinscription processes are central to the lives of millions of mothers in the United States and elsewhere (Roy and Burton 2007). They accounted for some of the family processes and household formation among New Hope working poor families as well.

*Identifying holistic patterns and themes.* Qualitative methods also can suggest profiles or ideal types for family processes that cut across demographic or measurement/scale categories. For example, Lareau (2003) described two broad prototypes or clusters of class differences in how parents prepared their children to adapt to their schools, neighborhoods, and family prospects: middle class "concerted cultivation" contrasted with lower class or working poor "natural growth" models for socialization and child development (cf. Kohn 1977). These profiles incorporate earlier qualitative and mixed methods studies of class differences in discipline, language use, stimulation, parenting styles and investment.

*Interpreting, contextualizing, challenging quantitative data.* Qualitative evidence helps inform us what the number "3" circled on a questionnaire means; what were our informants thinking about that item or scale topic; and why did a subject answer "yes" to a survey question. An interesting teaching exercise (or research method) asks a group to answer common items on well-known scales from 1–n, and then ask *why* someone chose 3, another 5, another 2 and so forth. Here are some items from a familism scale, for example: How important is it to you that . . . [your child] treat his/her parents with great respect?; [your child] live or go to college near his/her parents?; [your child] make sacrifices for your family? (1 = *not at all importan,* 2/3 = *somewhat*, 4/5 = *very important*). The explanations and even very brief follow-up questions and answers are often highly variable, interesting in their own ways, and

revealing far beyond the circled number. For example: What things indicate respect; why is it very important? What sacrifices have you have made? Why is it important to go far away for college? Revealing differences and class discussions emerge.

Qualitative data can be essential for interpreting and contextualizing survey and questionnaire data. Pearce and Denton (2011) used qualitative narratives about religion from teens, along with a quantitative analysis of five patterns of religious life (named Abiders, Adapters, Assenters, Avoiders, Atheists). Pearce and Denton preferred a person-centered approach to the *interpretation* of their data, over a variable-centered approach. "... youth see distinctly the multiple dimensions of religion and are comfortable packaging them together in various ways, even when their intensity or importance is not always consistent" (Pearce and Denton 2011, p. 140). The evidence from their study suggested that there isn't a unilineal religiosity scale that represents US adolescents along a simple high/low dimension,) so the qualitative interview data offered the best representation for the complexity of their findings.

Qualitative family research can discover new concepts and terms family members use that crystallize important dimensions of their lives. The CHILD project used child assessment, surveys and questionnaires, and teacher ratings, as well as qualitative fieldwork, observations and interviews in a longitudinal 16-year study of 100 Los Angeles area families with children with generalized developmental delays of various kinds. Parents described their struggles in their own words, and these interviews led to a number of useful constructs that distinguished family accommodation patterns (Gallimore et al. 1996). Families in the study face a familiar and daunting task. They have to re-balance their family lives to accommodate to their child with disabilities. *Accommodation* refers to the process of deciding what activities to do and which not to do given there is a child with disabilities in the family. Accommodation differs from coping with stressors and adaptation, however. It occurs with all levels of stress and responds to perturbations due in part to the child with disabilities, affecting the normal family daily routine. "Look, let me just tell you what I do all day to keep our family together, and then we can talk about supports and stress scales," one mother commented.

Parents frequently used the everyday term, *hassle*; their child was more or less a hassle for them. This is not a pejorative term in parents' everyday use but rather a practical description of the relative disruption and flow of the functional daily routine of activities due at least in part to the child with disabilities. The Ecocultural Family Interview (EFI), a conversational, qualitative method, asks parents about this process (Weisner 2011a). An outcome measure that emerged from this work is *sustainability* of the family, which refers to the attainment of family goals consistent with the moral direction of their lives, as well as the more pragmatic balancing of resources and time (Weisner et al. 2005). Not only parents could describe these circumstances; many adolescents with disabilities themselves, followed since they were age three or four, could provide a reasonable explanatory model of their own illness and sense of difference; "I speak a different dialect from other people," is how one boy described this (Daley and Weisner 2003).

The EFI narratives were summarized and systematically rated along a series of dimensions informed by what parents described to us and by theory from family

ecology and research on disability. These quantitative ratings, derived from qualitative interviews and home visits were used along with quantitative family assessment scales to predict child and family outcomes. EFI-derived ratings added significant predictive ability compared to quantitative family assessment scales alone (Nihira et al. 1994).

## Qualitative and Fieldwork Methods in Cross-Cultural Family Studies

*Understanding world variations in family norms and beliefs.* Qualitative fieldwork is essential for including cross-cultural, international, and minority and ethnic communities in family research. Qualitative field studies of families allow researches to understand the remarkably diverse and pluralistic goals, values, beliefs, scripts for everyday activities, and family norms around the world. It is still a useful question to ask: What is arguably the single most important thing to know about a family? The answer, according to some, is exactly where that family lives on Earth, or relatedly, the cultural community in which the family exists. As Therborn (2009) comments regarding his review of the seven broad cross-cultural family systems around the world, "The boys and girls of the world enter many different childhoods and depart them through many different doors" (pp. 338). These family system norms include residence patterns, inheritance laws, gender laws and roles in families, marriage practices, generational and age hierarchies, and many others. Only qualitative fieldwork can capture the variability, adherence, reach, emotional significance, enforcement and extent of influence of the diverse family norms found around the world.

A number of literature reviews find support for the importance of qualitative approaches in understanding families in the global context. For example, LeVine (2007) recently reviewed the ethnographic and qualitative evidence for the remarkable range of parenting across world family systems that have been described in the ethnographic record. Similarly, Barlow and Chapin (2010) reviewed qualitative research on the wide range of mothering and who does mothering in families in diverse cultural communities. Twenty-five years ago, Whiting and Edwards (1988) integrated ethnographic field data and quantitative naturalistic observations of children in family context in 14 communities. Whiting & Edwards show the effects of subsistence ecology, family and household composition, maternal workload and other features on children's social behavior (nurturance, responsibility, sociability, aggression and others). The amount and importance of these various social behaviors differs dramatically across cultures, as does types of work and family ecology, amount of maternal workloads and supports available, and family norms. Responsibility training, for example, seems fraught and difficult in middle class US families, but far less so in other families around the world, where children show strong task and social responsibility early (Ochs and Izquerdo 2009). *The Child* (Shweder et al. 2009) is an encyclopedic compendium that covers a wide range of family concerns related to socialization,

parenting, and child development, and includes cross-cultural, qualitative and ethnographic evidence from around the world. Where the very norms, family goals, and ecology of family life differ dramatically, as they can across cultures, qualitative research and understanding is essential prior to using standard quantitative measures. Even further, qualitative family research in other communities can uncover new family practices that were not thought possible at all, essentially unimagined, in one culture yet which not only occur but are common elsewhere.

Normal variation in family forms and practices is far greater than commonly included in research samples today. For example, 96 % of people studied in the top journals in six sub-disciplines of psychology from 2003 through 2007 were from North America, Europe, Australia, and Israel: "... this means that 96 % of psychological samples come from countries with only 12 % of the world's population" (Henrich et al. 2010, p. 63). "A randomly selected American undergraduate is more than 4000 times more likely to be a research participant than is a randomly selected person from outside of the West," (Henrich et al. 2010, p. 65). Contemporary family research samples are not representative of the family forms and family practices to be found around the world, and our knowledge of the world diversity in family life importantly depends on qualitative accounts of these variations.

*Qualitative research broadens understanding of family practices in ethnic minority and international settings that have positive outcomes for children and others.* Ethnographic fieldwork provides "existence proofs" for previously unknown family practices that challenge assumptions based only on contemporary Euro–American or Western contexts. For example, the majority of infants and young children around the world co-sleep with parents or others, and the associations of various parenting practices and developmental outcomes with co-sleeping appear quite positive (McKenna and McDade 2005; Morelli et al. 1992; Okami et al. 2002). Older siblings routinely and successfully are asked to care for younger siblings and cousins at ages (typically before 13) when it is thought impossible or dangerous according to US law and Western research (Weisner 1997). Gottlieb (2004) describes one example of the importance of socially distributed caretaking of children from the Beng in the Ivory Coast for example, and Seymour (1999) another among Northeast Indian families in Orissa, many of whom live in large joint households. Although there is a strong emphasis on the importance of adult–child play in US families, such activity, including mother–child play, turns out to be quite rare around the world in the past and still today, based on ethnographic evidence from a large sample of the world's societies (Lancy 2007). Although increased maternal literacy through formal schooling has long been known to be associated with increases in maternal and child health and lower fertility in families around the world, the mechanisms producing this association in fact were not known. A very recent cross-cultural study of family and mothering in Mexico, Venezuela, Nepal, and Zambia, in both rural and urban settings, and in girls and boys with varying levels of schooling, was conducted by LeVine, LeVine, Schnell-Anzola, Rowe and Dexter (2012). The researchers blended community ethnographic study, qualitative interviews and narratives of mothers and children, and quantitative studies of literacy, health, fertility, and language use with

children. The team found that maternal increases in literacy through formal schooling led to new *communicative socialization processes* in families and institutions which in turn led to fertility declines, gains in health, and increases in well-being around the world. All these studies used qualitative, ethnographic methods, usually integrated with quantitative measures, to first provide a wider cross-cultural sample, and then search for correlates of the various family and parenting practices of interest.

## Conclusion

The suite of qualitative, ethnographic, and fieldwork methods provide remarkable evidence about family forms, family relationships, and family experience. Why would some type of qualitative and contextual evidence *not* be included in many family studies, where feasible and relevant? Many researchers do not have training in qualitative methods. It is recommended that researchers without such training collaborate with those who do have it. Qualitative research is often costly and time consuming. However, costs and time can be managed by using subsamples, nested designs, parallel or "ghost" samples, and by applying for funding when qualitative data clearly can add value to empirical evidence and theory. IRBs and other oversight bodies concerned about and responsible for human participant protections in research currently regularly approve qualitative methods in family research. Others have avoided qualitative approaches because of data and analytic challenges. Today, however, various software packages (Nvivo, Atlas, MaxQDA, Ethnograph, Dedoose) have been developed for relatively quick input and analysis of text and in some cases video data, as well as ways to link to quantitative data. Today, there are also increasingly accepted best practices for the conduct of qualitative research, including criteria for interviewing, focus groups, fieldwork observation, sociolinguistic and narrative methods, and others, as well as ways to analyze the data, and link those findings to quantitative data.

This chapter has outlined a number of qualitative methods used in family research. These approaches have yielded rich, new, and varied insights into the lives of families across the globe. Interviews, observations, collection and review of materials, and other creative techniques form a powerful suite of methodological approaches useful across multiple disciplines. The suite of qualitative methods has been central to research that describes family life, informs family and developmental theories, predicts child and family behavior, and enhances the efficacy and scalability of program implementation. Qualitative and quantitative methods have been creatively married in a number of the most cutting-edge and impactful basic and applied studies in family research. Whether as a stand-alone qualitative or ethnographic family study or part of a mixed methods study, new findings important in family research discovered through qualitative methods continue to enrich the field.

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